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THE
BANKER-LORD:

A NOVEL.

“ Were all things plain, then all sides must agree,
And faith itself be lost in certainty ;
To live uprightly, then, is sure the best :
To save ourselves, and not to damn the rest.”—DRYDEN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE BANKER-LORD.

CHAPTER I.

IT was dancing day at Ellistone House—that “fashionable establishment where young ladies were educated on the system of a private family; morals and manners making the first objects of attention; while the foundation of all was laid on the only true basis—viz., Christian principles.” So said the ornamented card which Mrs. Ellistone found no difficulty in interpreting to the satisfaction of the various applicants, to whose dense, matter-of-fact minds a doubt might occur as to the limits of its meaning.

“I trust, Mrs. Ellistone,” so commenced a black-browed, pale-faced, solemn-looking father, “we may rely on the assurance that all is *really* founded on true Christian principles; for I confess Mrs. L. and I consider all sublunary matters——”

But Mrs. Ellistone interrupted him with—

“ Oh dear ! Sir, make your mind perfectly easy on that subject ! ” and an eloquent sigh formed a satisfactory comment on the somewhat equivocal answer.

“ I hope not methodistical, Mrs. Ellistone ? ” inquired a gay and fashionable mother, who held a beautiful child by the hand ; and she accompanied the question by a meaning smile.

“ Oh dear, no, Ma’am—by no means,” Mrs. Ellistone returned, with a corresponding smile, which satisfied the mother’s heart.

“ I don’t much approve of dancing, Mrs. Ellistone,” insinuated a maiden aunt, who had danced all her partners to death, and who intended to make the amende in the person of a fair young orphan niece who had fallen to her charge.

“ Oh, Miss S——, believe me, you need not feel the least uneasiness on *that* subject ; dancing is here taught solely to give the young ladies an upright carriage—so essential to health—and as a healthful exercise on rainy days, while it is my study to divest it of the levity that—however, if you prefer gymnastics—”

“ Gymnastics ! oh dear, Mrs. Ellistone, how *could* you name such a thing to me ? I protest, I think the march of intellect has driven people mad, and instead of strength of mind, they are only acquiring strength of body ! In my childhood,

young girls were not allowed to move beyond what was necessary for the purposes of life itself, and a ladylike education ; while strength, agility, or even too much health, were considered vulgar misfortunes. But now I expect we shall have our young ladies knocking down their footmen, or challenging their maids to a boxing match. Oh, no ! dancing in preference to gymnastics ! But, pray do guard her mind from vanity, Mrs. Ellistone."

"I hope your seriousness does not extend to dancing, Mrs. Ellistone ?" inquired a young widowed father ; "for if so, we part at once ; as I confess I consider elegant dancing one of the most captivating accomplishments a young female can possess."

"I only trust, Sir Edward, I shall be as fortunate in seconding your wishes on every other point, as I flatter myself I shall in this. Perhaps it will be enough to tell you I am so very happy as to procure the attendance of Monsieur —— himself, when he can be spared from the Opera House, at what expense you may form some idea !"

"I am satisfied," said the father. And notwithstanding two mishaps, one lady having eloped with the dancing-master, and another having become "serious," the establishment flourished ; for the events were supposed to neutralize each other. To none of these classes of parents, however, did the little girl belong, to whom this dancing-day was a

sort of crisis. She was the only daughter of Mr. L'Estrange, who had succeeded his father, the Hon. Hubert L'Estrange, younger son of an Irish earl, as sole proprietor of an extensive banking establishment in London. The little girl had had the misfortune to lose her mother while yet almost an infant, and she was sent to the "fashionable establishment" of Ellistone House with no other conditions annexed, than that no expense should be spared in her education ; but what that education was to comprise, was left to the consciences of those who were to direct it.

It was, as we have said, "dancing-day," and the pupils were seated round the handsome apartment, bearing but little similitude to an ordinary "school-room," waiting the arrival of that important personage, Monsieur ——, the opera-dancer ; while Mrs. Ellistone, from her chair of state, cast her cold, dignified eye critically over the coiffure and chaussure of the little assembly. "What detains Madame?" she asked at last, "and where is Miss L'Estrange?" but before it was decided to whom these questions were addressed, or who was condemned to answer them, a slight bustle was heard at the door of the apartment, and "Madame," the French governess, entered ; dragging after her a beautiful little girl, whose dress, both in material and arrangement, together with her dishevelled tresses, formed a striking contrast to those of her

companions. Had Massena appeared on the field of battle in the costume of the saloon, Buonaparte himself could not have looked upon him with more astonishment, nor called into his countenance a stronger expression of insulted majesty than did Mrs. Ellistone as this group approached her; the French governess chattering all the way up the long apartment with a volubility that might have defied even Parisian ears. Mrs. Ellistone coldly asked, "What is the meaning of all this?" as if not a word had been uttered. She did not choose to say, "speak English," but the governess endeavoured to take the hint.

"Ma foi, den je vous dirai, Madame—I will tell you den, Ma'am,—Ma'amselle was missin' ven de young demoiselles did come for to dress pour la danse—high, low, up, down, here, dere, I did—vat you call chercher?—to seeka for her, and no find her, till a my very 'art did jomp out of me, vat you call *palpitation*,—tump! tump! tump!—he went on a my side! and, at last, au desespoir, I vas a coming for to tell you, Madame, that she vas gone, lost, vat you call mislaid,—ven, aah! I peep, peep under de bed, and dere, assurément, je l'ai trouvée. Ah, oui!" she continued, shaking her hand threateningly and triumphantly at the child, "je l'ai trouvée! But who did you tink, Madame, I did find wid her?"

"For Heaven's sake! who?" exclaimed the lady,

turning pale, and startled at last out of cold propriety.

“Ah, non ! non ! mon Dieu ! non !” said the governess, eagerly ; “it vash no *who*, no persone ; but a—a—a livre—a book ! So I pull, pull her out, and say, ‘*Pourquoi ne t’habilles tu pour la danse, Ma’amselle ?*’ ven she tell me, God a forbid, and dat she find it in this book ; and ven I would boucler les cheveux, and put on her frock, she pull and pull on me, et se plie, comment le direz vous ? tiwist ote o’ my hand, ’till I no could dress her—and drag her doen to you, Madame.”

Mrs. Ellistone’s first movement was to hold out her hand slowly for the offending volume, the companion of the culprit’s guilt ; a single glance only was necessary to convince her that it was a copy of the New Testament, fancifully bound, and sent as a Christmas-present by the maiden aunt to the orphan niece, and by her lent to her young companion, our future heroine.

“What were you doing with this book ?” Mrs. Ellistone inquired, as might a judge on being handed the instrument with which a murder had been committed.

“Reading it, Ma’am,” the child replied, with bewildering naïveté.

“Was there not a portion of it read to you this morning ?”

“There was, Ma’am.”

“ And was that not sufficient ?”

“ I did not understand it then, Ma’am, and was reading it again.”

“ And who gave you leave to read it again ?”

“ God, I thought, did, Ma’am.”

“ And what made you think so, pray ?”

“ Because he gave little children leave to come to him.”

This again was a troublesome answer, to one at least who mistook the real point wherein the child’s fault lay, so Mrs. Ellistone shifted her position.

“ And do you understand it any better now, pray ?”

“ I think I do, Ma’am.”

“ What may it be then ? let me hear.” And this, besides being a vague question in itself, was said with an air of such mocking and ironical contempt, that the child began to think she really must have been guilty of some wild absurdity in supposing she could have understood it. Her preceptress saw the advantage she had obtained. “ Come, come,” she said, “ let us have no more of this. I’m sure you will never do so again ; there, go my love, and dress yourself as quickly as possible. Monsieur will be here immediately, and would faint if he saw you such a figure.” But this threat, by recalling to the child, whose understanding and conscience had just begun to dawn

on this unpropitious morning, a recollection of her own motives and feelings, restored to her a momentary courage, and she stood blushing and immovable.

“Why don’t you go?” Mrs. Ellistone repeated; “you will scarcely have time to plait your hair properly, even with Madame’s kind assistance.”

“But that’s just what I thought was forbidden, Ma’am,” the child ventured to remonstrate.

“Forbidden! by whom?” asked Mrs. Ellistone, again unaffectedly startled out of her cold, sarcastic dignity.

“By God, in that book, Ma’am,” pointing her little rosy-tipped finger towards the Testament. The French governess nodded her frizzled head at Mrs. Ellistone, thereby saying, as plainly as nod could speak, “there lies the root of the disease;” while Mrs. Ellistone, with that petulance with which tottering dignity is apt to prop itself, exclaimed, “Don’t point, Miss L’Estrange. How often have you been forbidden *that* ;” and then resuming her inquisitorial manner, she asked, “and do you mean to say that this was the only reason for your hiding, and not suffering yourself to be dressed?”

“It was, Ma’am.”

For a moment even Mrs. Ellistone’s ill-temper gave way before this ingenuous simplicity, but she soon recovered it, as the difficulty of refuting it returned;

and looking again towards the child with an accession of coldness and dignity, she said, "Let me hear no more of such ridiculous nonsense, I desire; little girls are not expected to understand books for themselves, especially the Bible; even grown people are told they may wrest it to their own destruction. Little girls are only to do as they are desired; so go directly and dress yourself as quickly and as nicely as you can. I expect company to-day; so put on your blue crape frock that suits so well with your pretty eyes, and let not one of those tears fall to dim them. Come and kiss me—there's a love,—go, and let me hear the visitors ask again, as they did before, who that sweet happy-looking child is, and trust to me for making you good—allez;" and the child smiled and suffered herself to be drawn away, practically, if not theoretically, convinced that little girls could not have been comprehended in the bible-command respecting little children.

CHAPTER II.

“ANY news this morning, papa?” asked the beautiful daughter of Mr. L’Estrange, as together they lounged over the splendidly-appointed breakfast table in the breakfast room of one of the handsomest and best appointed houses in Belgrave Square, the one studying the morning papers, the other tracing figures on the cloth with her fork.

“News, eh? no, I can’t say much news,” answered Mr. L’Estrange, without seeming to know what he answered, or scarcely that he answered at all; but as the question happened to reach his ear at the moment that his eye had reached the end of the page, while he turned the paper and folded it down, he had time to cast a glance on his daughter; and, as if something in her exquisite countenance, and Hebe-like appearance, arrested his attention, and forced his mind to take note of the

sounds which had been transmitted from a being so lovely, he repeated, in a less absent tone, "News, love, did you ask? what sort of news could interest a young lady, except 'the fashions,' and them I shall leave to your own perusal this moment. Even the births, deaths, and marriages can have no interest for you as yet, born, as I may say, but yesterday." For such was the period elapsed since Miss L'Estrange had left the "fashionable establishment" for young ladies' education, where she had spent the last nine years of her life, to preside, as sole mistress, over the house of her widower-father, reputed one of the wealthiest bankers in England.

"I assure you, papa, it was not of either I inquired," she replied. "I asked if there is any fresh cause for alarm from the disaffected?"

"What do you mean, my love?" he asked; "I do not understand you."

"I mean the papists—the rebels—the Irish, in short," she answered.

Her father stared at her a moment in unaffected astonishment, before he exclaimed—

"Why, you little goose, what have you to do with such subjects?"

"What have I to do with them, my dear papa? surely every one liable to suffer by them has a right to feel interested in them."

Her father laughed aloud.

“ Well done, my little petticoat politician !—my agitator of eighteen !” he exclaimed.

“ Nay, sir, not agitator, at least; let us usurp nothing from our adversaries—not even their names.”

“ But how on earth have you acquired this violence, child ?” Mr. L’Estrange asked again, still highly amused. “ I suppose it is the effects of the papers I have been sending you to Ellisstone House, when I should have left you to your French Grammar ?”

“ No, papa; long before I ever read a newspaper my feelings were the same. The papers have only served to shew me that the evils are increasing, and that we may look to the end as not far off.”

“ Why, God bless my soul, child, are you mad ? what end are you talking of ? or what stuff have you been filling your brains with, instead of caps and flowers ? For heaven’s sake, get rid of this trash as soon as you can ; and—but what the deuce ails the girl now ? why, you are absolutely going to cry or faint, I believe !”

“ No, no, my dear papa,” his daughter gasped out ; “ but allow me to ask you one question, Sir,” and she clasped her hands and looked tremblingly into his face, “ Are you not—surely it cannot be that you have changed your principles ?”

Mr. L’Estrange’s amusement seemed now about

to be converted into alarm; he laid the newspaper out of his hand, and looked seriously, almost anxiously on his daughter, as he said—

“Rosa, what is the meaning of this? I request you will explain what you mean by such strange questions?”

“Are they indeed so strange, papa?” the young lady asked, as the colour deepened on her beautiful cheek. “I meant only to ask if it is possible you are not still a Tory?”

“A Tory? to be sure I am a Tory; what else should I be but a Tory, as all my family have been before me? but I am no great politician; and if Mrs. Ellistone has made you one she can scarcely have taught you anything that will make amends for it.”

“My dear papa, Mrs. Ellistone no more taught us political principles than any other natural instinct; but surely it would have been impossible that *I*, at least, could be deficient in them.”

“Why you particularly? oh, I suppose because the rebels sacked the old family castle in 98—ha! ha! ha!—is that it, Rosa? But what have *you* to do with that now, child? Time was, indeed, when we might have had an interest in it; but you know since my old uncle took it into his head to marry and have a son, there is an end of Ireland for us.”

And thus lightly did the father treat a subject

on which the daughter had expended all the enthusiasm of an ardent heart, debarred, by the circumstances of her education, from all the more natural, more usual channels for its expenditure. She was the only daughter of her father, who was the grandson of the Irish Earl of Lisbrian. His father, the younger son of the Earl, had married an English lady, daughter of an eminent banker, and, subduing the Irish pride that prefers poverty and idleness to industry and wealth, joined the concern, and in time became its sole proprietor; a position which he bequeathed to his son, in whom, however, as some diseases are said to do, the national propensities which slumbered in the father seemed to break out with double force; and, although the bank still maintained its character for wealth and security, many shook their heads, and wondered how it was so under the sole management of the gayest and most expensive widower of his circle.

For years, indeed, Mr. L'Estrange had believed himself certain of succeeding to the title and estates of his Irish uncle; and with more apparent plausibility than such expectations can always plead, as the superannuated roué, who had spent his life on the Continent, had never given any one cause to doubt the sincerity of his protestations against the holy state of wedlock. On the strength of these expectations, Mr. L'Estrange felt he had a right

to be idle; and when the account of the Irish rebellion, and the total sack of his deserted, but magnificent castle, furnished the old Earl with an excuse, which he had for some time past wished for, to return to his native land; and when domestic associations reawakened by this return, as he said, but as others said, the necessity of a kind nurse-tender, induced him to marry, and Mr. L'Estrange found his expectations blasted, the habits of idleness and expense seemed too deeply rooted, or else his affairs were too prosperous for him to make any change; so, after the first exclamation of surprise and disappointment, the event seemed almost to pass from his mind, and he went on his way, gay and good-humoured, as before. There was one, however, on whom these events in her family made a deeper impression—it was his gentle daughter.

Not born for many years after what is called the Irish rebellion, par excellence, and never having seen the land of her forefathers, it might have been supposed that the sack of the castle, and the marriage of her grand-uncle, would have passed from her mind when they ceased to be topics of conversation with her father; but such was not the case. Those events, which to him had been some of the common, passing disappointments of life, had fallen upon her infant spirit with enduring intensity, because they had first come to her connected with

the sorrow of her parents; and who cannot look back with shuddering, however far advanced they may be in life, upon the moment when they first knew sorrow through the person they loved best? Mr. L'Estrange indeed felt most for his uncle's marriage, but he spoke most of the castle—and the heart of his child echoed his words, believing them to be his feelings, and treasured in its depths a mingled sensation of hatred and dread of the Catholic party, which he had pronounced to be the perpetrators of the outrage.

Separated almost in her infancy, in consequence of her mother's death, from all the endearing ties and interests of home, these recollections served her as something upon which to hang all her superfluous emotions; and she grew up in a sort of visionary world, persuaded not only that the church and state, which she honoured and adored, were crumbling before the machinations of the same party that had destroyed the castle of her ancestors, and her father's happiness—but that, of that party, each and all were wantonly and irredeemably wicked, while all of the other were good and upright. Nor was there aught in the circumstances of her education to correct this delusion, even if it had been known. Mrs. Ellistone received no pupils of the dreaded sect—probably from not feeling the capability of instructing them; and while this exclusion had its share in fostering

the prejudices of the enthusiastic girl, some of the more violent newspapers of the opposite party, which were the only ones she had happened to see, she received as the oracles of impartial veracity. It is true, Mr. L'Estrange himself had lived to laugh at the sack of the old castle, and even to curse the folly of his uncle—between whom and himself all direct communication had ceased since the marriage of the latter—for rebuilding it in a style of magnificence which combined much of its former feudal grandeur with all of modern elegance and—let it not be considered an anti-climax to add—*comfort*, since *he* was no longer to inherit it; but his daughter had gone to school before these heresies were broached; and as her two brothers, both older than herself, had gone to Eton, where domestic prejudices must be strong indeed if they survive the first few months, it seemed as if her innocent little heart was intended to concentrate within itself all the feelings that such events were calculated to produce.

Still, emotion of almost any sort is not unhappiness to the young; it is only in after-life, when experience has taught us to dread the consequences, or the reaction, that we shrink from emotion; and Rosa L'Estrange, feeling no ill effects from these phantoms of her imagination, grew up a happy, joyous, beautiful girl, loving those with and by whom she was brought up, because she *was* brought up by them—and loving the recollection of her heedless

but indulgent father, and her two brothers, more than children, or sisters generally love fathers and brothers—but still believing that she had one grand object beyond them all, approved by her judgment and cherished by her feelings. It was in this paroxysm of romance that she left her school, and, returning to her father's house, catechised him in the manner that we have seen.

They had both been silent some minutes, when Mr. L'Estrange suddenly said, "You have returned home at an unfortunate moment for yourself, my dearest girl; there is not a soul of my acquaintance remaining in London at this sultry season,—of ladies, I mean,—and I am tied more closely than usual to the desk. However, the moment Steen returns, we shall take a trip to Cheltenham; I have promised some friends of mine to introduce you to them there."

"Who is Steen, papa?"

"Steen—why, Steen is,—I believe I may as well say with a good grace that Steen is my head clerk; at least, he is acting as such ever since poor old Groveside, my father's trusty man of business, died. I never intended to promote this young fellow so rapidly; but, somehow, he was on the spot, and seemed intelligent, and so he hung on from time to time; though, now that I have seen more of both, I think I like Kelly better of the two."

"Kelly? is he another clerk?"

“ Yes ; a clear-headed, upright fellow.”

“ But Irish, by the name ?”

“ Why do you say, *but* Irish ? I hope you don’t mean to disown the country of your forefathers ? However, from the ridiculous state your mind seems in, I suppose it would be useless for me to make a proposal which I had intended making before I knew your sentiments. This young man, this Kelly, met with a severe accident some time since, and his mother hurried over from the wilds of Ireland, whence she had never emerged before, to attend him ; and, as they are tenants of my uncle’s, who sent this lad over to me to provide for, I thought it would be taken as a great kindness if you were to call upon Mrs. Kelly, and shew her some attention ; for, although I never expect to see or hear from my uncle again, much less to inherit a sous from him, still he is the head of the family ; and his children and mine may be acquainted hereafter, so it is well to oblige him in any trifling matter ; but, as I said before, I suppose I need not think of it in this instance, as Mrs. Kelly is not only an Irishwoman, but a Papist.”

The unmanageable blood rushed over Miss L’Estrange’s cheek, and her eyes were involuntarily cast down, as her father paused for an answer ; perceiving her silent, the very extreme of her prejudice struck him as ludicrous, and once more he burst into a fit of genuine laughter.

“’Pon my soul, child, I begin to fear you are mad!” he exclaimed, at last. “Tis so ridiculous to see a pretty graceful creature, with shining hair and soft blue eyes, a violent ultra-politician and bigot! If you had even black eyes, or a less feminine complexion, it would be less inconceivable! What! suppose, Rosa, a Whig or a Papist—for with you they seem to be one and the same thing—were to propose for you?”

“I would rather die than accept him,” was the answer, pronounced with such cool decision as convinced her father that it was sincere. Again he laughed aloud.

“Well, you might perhaps find some to bear you out in that,” he said; “but few, even of the ultras, carry it to the extreme of avoiding acquaintance with a lady for her religion. And what, suppose, my fair daughter, I were to act the papa in good earnest, and command you to visit this lady, instead of requesting you?”

Miss L’Estrange looked in her father’s face inquiringly for a moment,—he caught the look, and smiling good-humouredly, said—

“Nay, don’t be alarmed; I don’t mean to do so. You have come home to be mistress of my house and of yourself; so do as you please, child; only, for your own sake, I advise you to endeavour to get rid of some of that unfeminine stuff and nonsense.”

And as he said so he rose from the breakfast

table, and was about to leave the room; but his daughter rose also, and more quickly, and hastening towards him, she put one arm pleadingly round his neck, and looking in his face, with eyes liquid with emotion, and a varying cheek, seemed to ask if she might embrace him,—he caught her to his heart; and, as she sobbed on his bosom, she said—

“God forbid, my dearest papa, that your wishes should ever cease to be commands to me; and although I hope I may die before I relax in my principles, and so take one more, atom though it be, from our falling church and constitution, I shall not only subdue my feelings so far as to call upon this lady, but sincerely trust I may find something in her to excuse—I mean,” she added, with a deprecating smile, “to deprive my obedience of the crown of martyrdom.”

“I trust so too, my love, for your own sake,” her father said, once more fondly embracing her; “and indeed I have no doubt but that you will. Young Kelly, I assure you, is quite presentable—to be sure, he has been educated in Dublin, and is a Protestant,” he added, smiling, “as his father is; But I hear they are altogether very respectable people, and almost the only family with which my uncle associates now; so I really hope you will find her, if not a radical cure for your prejudices, at least an acquisition in your present soli-

tude; here is her address, which I got this morning from her son. I'm afraid it is in some very out-of-the-way place; for strangers, like her, coming to London, never know where to go, and her son seemed rather ashamed of it, and muttered something about the people of the house having some claim on her—I did not attend to him, as I don't think you will mind the length of the drive much."

"At least, I shall be able to control my impatience for this meeting," she answered, with a playful smile.

"Well, here is the direction, love, and here is what may please you better," opening his pocket-book and looking through its folds; but finding it empty, he added, "I see I have no money about me; however, it is not the least matter; you will find the people only too ready to trust you, and there must be a thousand little things you want on coming from school, not but that I like your mode of dressing of all things—that pale green silk is particularly becoming to you; and you do right to brush the hair back from your fair forehead. God bless you, my child," he said, kissing that same fair forehead, as he left the room, "you'll do very well, in spite of your politics."

CHAPTER III.

ON her father's leaving the room, Miss L'Es-trange resumed her chair, as if mechanically ; and deliberately brushing away the crumbs, cleared a place for her elbow on the table, and then leaned her lovely cheek upon her not less lovely hand, and fell into a reverie.

“ What can my father mean by ‘ doing well enough in spite of my politics’ ? ” was the first definite question that presented itself to her mind. She was for some moments really unable to reply to it ; but, by degrees, those who had watched her attentively might have seen the soft colour grow deeper and deeper upon her cheek, until it ended in a vivid blush, as she recollected, that, in the last visit her elder brother had paid her, on his way to join the foreign embassy, to which he had been

appointed attaché, through the interest of an Oxford friend, whose father, the Marquis of Hallimore, was the ambassador, he had held her from him at arm's-length, and scanning her from head to foot with an eye so critical that she shrank abashed beneath it, had finally nodded his head approvingly, declared she would "do," and, lamenting that there was not then an opportunity for exhibiting her to his young friend, who intended accompanying the embassy, charged her to keep her heart disengaged until their return; and as she now, by some delicate link of association, coupled these observations with her father's speech, they served to throw light upon each other. But as her father seemed to intimate that "her politics" would be a drawback upon her fortunes, and as she, in her enthusiasm, could suppose this only to be because of their being obnoxious to those on whom such fortunes might depend, she became but the more determined to preserve them inviolate, and to die a maiden rather than a Whig.

Still she was but eighteen—and a lovely, beautiful girl—accustomed to find herself the favourite of a large, though select, assemblage of young persons of her own age and habits; and although she had been but one day at home, the greater part of that day having been spent utterly alone,—for her younger brother was still at Oxford—she felt not at all sorry at finding her con-

science seared, if not satisfied, by his request to her to go to seek even a papist acquaintance. "I know, of course," she said to herself, "that there is nothing in the Catholic religion actually inconsistent with polish and refinement; for there is the Duchess of —, Lady —, and others, whom I must suppose are all lady-like persons; but then they are English. Still, as my father says that these people are 'highly respectable,' this Mrs. Kelly must be something superior to what I had imagined her class and country to produce; and as Lord Lisbrian associates with so few, it would seem as if he were fastidious. Perhaps they may have lived very much on the Continent when he was there, though I think papa said she had never been out of Ireland before. So much the better. I shall see a true and real specimen; and I should be far from sorry if, in everything not touching principles, I could conform to dear papa's wishes, who, after all, is and must be stanch at heart." And with these sentiments the young lady stepped into her carriage, and magnanimously gave the order — "to No. 8, Milk Street."

"Milk Street, Ma'am?" the footman repeated, dubiously; and looking up to the coachman, asked, "Do you know Milk Street?"

"No," was the response, in a low voice; "ask in the house." And, after the delay of a few minutes, the footman returned; and, while taking

his place behind the carriage, gave to the coachman some directions wholly unintelligible to Miss L'Estrange, and away they drove. Still, neither the ignorance of the servants respecting the locality, nor her father's previous intimation, had at all prepared her for the length of the drive, or the appearance of the streets they passed through; and she would at last have become seriously alarmed, but that she consoled herself with the belief that they were driving into the country, and should find the lady had, for the sake of fresh air, taken up her abode in one of those isolated houses outside cities, which call themselves streets, that others may make good their words. Exactly as she came to this conclusion, the carriage stopped short in one of the closest and dirtiest streets she had yet been in; and while she looked out impatiently to see what had impeded their hasty escape from it, the footman once more appeared at the window, and, with a countenance in which inquiry and remonstrance were curiously blended, announced that they were arrived in Milk Street.

“This?” Miss L'Estrange exclaimed, looking round her in dismay, and putting her perfumed handkerchief to her nose. “There must surely be some mistake. Inquire, pray, if there is not another Milk-street.” But no other Milk-street could be heard of; and an Irishman would have pointed to the sewer of white puddle running along the path-

way as a proof that they were in the right place. "There must certainly be some mistake," Miss L'Estrange still repeated, in perplexity, half-tempted to turn back, yet unwilling to disappoint her father, or, if the truth must be told, to lose making the only acquaintance within her reach, when she had proceeded both morally and physically so far upon her way. After a moment's pause, partly between the hope of escape altogether, and the wish to let her dignity down by gentle degrees, she desired the servant to see whether there were any numbers on the doors.

"Yes, Ma'am ; there's number eight," he said, pointing to a door a short distance from them, but making no attempt to go towards it.

"Perhaps, then, it would be as well to inquire there," Miss L'Estrange faltered out, absolutely ashamed to admit the possibility that to him seemed impossible. The man was proceeding to obey, when she ventured to say, "The carriage may as well move on there ; it could scarcely turn here, I suppose."

The order was given ; and the carriage moved on, and again drew up at the door of a house, so squalid in its appearance that Miss L'Estrange's ideas suddenly underwent a total revolution, and she, being not at all unscathed by romance—as, what ardent, innocent girl, brought up in seclusion, ever is?—came at once to the conclusion that, if

this was Mrs. Kelly's abode, there was some gentle mystery connected with it, and that she was some pale, delicate, interesting being, steeped to the very lips in poverty, who, too refined to make it known, had concealed herself here to watch over the health of a favourite son, on whom their hopes depended. "And if it be so," whispered Miss L'Estrange's kind heart, forgetting the party prejudice of years, in the partial kindness of a moment,—“if it be so, her errors of doctrine, religious or political, shall be no impediment to my sympathy.

“Knock, William, and ask if they could direct us where Mrs. Kelly is to be found.” The servant turned to obey; but ere he had, on tiptoes, reached the dingy door, it was suddenly opened, and a damsel, whose fresh and healthful colour and proportions formed a strange contrast to all around her, both animate and inanimate, had launched herself almost against him ere she was able, with a look of terror and astonishment, to control the impetus with which she had been hurrying out to catch a glimpse of the equipage, the close and aristocratic roll of which had shaken the house to its foundations, without conveying the monstrous idea to its inhabitants that it could intend to stop at *their* door. No sooner, however, did this fact force itself on the fair maiden's comprehension, than she flung herself back as quickly as she had dashed forwards, and would, in her horrid amaze-

ment, have clapped the said door in the man's face if he had not gently put his hand against it; upon which, preparing to dive again into the unfathomable darkness of the prolonged cell, by courtesy called a hall, she was only arrested by his calling out, "Pray, can you tell me where Mrs. Kelly lodges in this direction?"

After a bewildered stare, in which she seemed endeavouring to collect at once her senses and her breath, the girl answered in an accent such as caused even him, who had occasionally made purchases in Covent Garden market, to start—

"Is it Mrs. Kelly? a fhare would she lodge but wid Mrs. Coghlan?"

"And where, pray, does Mrs. Coghlan live?"

"Fhare? here to be sure; fhare else?"

"Is Mrs. Kelly at home at present, then?"

"At home? sure she isn't, shur; sure she's here still, plase your—that is, I mane, shur;" for although the man's air and accent had tempted the wild Irish girl, after her first alarm, to dub him "an honourable man," the damning sign of *livery* saved her from falling into the snare of confounding ranks, which all of her class and country are so tenacious to avoid.

"But is she in the house? will she see company? will she admit Miss L'Estrange?" he asked.

"L'Esthrange! Miss L'Esthrange! admit Miss

L'Estrange ! by Japers !" and without further reply, she darted into the dark abyss, and, as the man could hear, up a flight of stairs with unmeasured strides.

He returned to the carriage to report progress ; and after a fierce struggle between romance and reality in the young lady's breast, romance once more gained the victory, and she determined to await the event ; for in proportion as appearances became desperate, imagination poured out its generous aids, until at last, as she thought of the poor papist lady, she actually conjured up in her mind a sort of temporary oratoire, poorly appointed indeed as to materials, but rich in ideality, in which knelt or reclined a faded form, in a cheap, but exquisitely white muslin wrapping gown, her pale cheek at that moment mantling with a sensitive blush as she heard a stranger inquiring for her ; perhaps even pressing the ebony crucifix to her lips as a token of her resignation, or casting her eyes upon an image of the Virgin for protection ; for, knowing them only as historical or fabulous characters, never once in the course of her life had Miss L'Estrange thought of a Roman catholic apart from crucifixes, images, or rosaries. But, although theoretically, and as a body, she had taught herself to hate them, her heart refused to reduce her theory to practice or to individuality ; and she had actually applied the handkerchief to her eyes at

her own fancy-sketch, when the words, "How do you do, my dear young lady? how are you, Miss L'Estrange, my dear?" poured into the carriage, in hearty, cordial, joyous accents, but with such a brogue as even imagination refused to recognise, gave the palm once more to reality, and she removed her handkerchief from her eyes with a perceptible start.

The image that took its place was not that of her fancy; it was a woman at the unromantic age of fifty-five or sixty, in all the rotundity and redness that health, happiness, and good-humour generally produce in such a lapse of time upon their votaries. Neither was she clad in unpretending white muslin—but, although the day and situation were oppressive, in one of the heaviest and most showy of Irish tabinets, considerably the worse for the dense smoke of London; while, over her grey hair, simply combed upon her broad forehead, she wore a muslin cap of such scanty dimensions and unusual form, as, joined to the expansive good-humour of the face it did *not* shade, might have led one to suppose she considered it a sin to conceal the liberality of nature; an idea which the display of her broad, fat, and still smooth and white throat was calculated to confirm.

Miss L'Estrange had gazed upon this image for a moment before she perceived that the straining of the fingers belonging to the massive arm that

hung over the door into the carriage towards her, was for the purpose of shaking hands with her; and although, when she did become aware of the alarming fact, her natural impulse was to move hastily to the other side, she checked herself with an effort, and desperately immolating the tips of her fingers on the altar of politeness, she stammered forth, "My father—Mr. L'Estrange, of Belgrave Square, sent me to wait upon Mrs. Kelly, an Irish lady; but, I believe—I suppose—I have mistaken the direction."

"Suppose no such thing, then, my dear," the lady heartily responded; "for here I am, as large as life, at your service; and, indeed, my very heart is glad to see the old livery once more. And how is your papa, my dear? You're not a bit like your granduncle yourself! but no matter for that; you, or any of your name, are heartily welcome to Mary Kelly. And now wont you walk in?" and she proceeded herself to tug at the handle of the door in a manner much more likely to wrench it off its hinges than to effect her object. The footman hastened to the rescue; but having got it safe into his hand, he looked to his young lady for directions how to proceed.

Miss L'Estrange, in the meantime, was more bewildered than ever. Perfectly shocked, if not frightened, by the predicament in which she found herself, and convinced either that her father must have been

under some entire misconception with respect to the person to whom he had sent her, or that still she had arrived at a wrong destination, she was considering what excuse she could make for driving away at once, when Mrs. Kelly again popped her head into the carriage, with the same expression of honest, hearty, unsuspecting good-humour, to ask what was the cause of the delay; adding, in a whisper, and with a sort of backward nod towards the Irish girl who, her eye "in a fine frenzy rolling," still stood at the door—

"Not, indeed, that my lodgings is by any means all I could wish; but, you see, they're kept by a poor widow, a counthrywoman of my own, and you know, of course, I couldn't go past her; so I hope you'll be so good as to put up with them, as you were so kind as to come so far to see me."

Miss L'Estrange felt it impossible to resist this appeal without positive incivility; but still, as drowning persons grasp at straws, she hesitatingly said—

"The lady I mean has a son who is——"

"Clerk to your papa,—the very thing, my dear,—who but my poor John? Many thanks to your papa and his uncle, both. Come—come your ways in, dear; there's a crowd gatherin, for it's not often such a sight is seen in these sthreets."

This intimation decided Miss L'Estrange—for youth ever seeks the momentary escape—and, although not without a slight palpitation of the

heart, she desired to have the carriage opened, and sprang within the shelter of the door.

Had Miss L'Estrange been even an occasional visitor during her vacations at her father's house, it is probable she would have only felt amused at the novelty of her present position; but the necessary seclusion of a school aiming at aristocratic exclusiveness, from which, since nine years of age, she had scarcely been absent for a whole day, while it perfected her in all that was considered desirable or ornamental to the high-born lady, had taught her fastidiousness as a duty, and left her to cultivate bigotry as a principle.

Arrived inside the door, she paused once more; for although the fair mountaineer, either unversed in the signs of a lady leaving her carriage, which Miss L'Estrange's rapid movements did not give her time to learn then, or else unable to tear herself from the scene of attraction, crushed herself back against the side wall of the hall, holding back her drapery—albeit, not too ample—with her hands at either side, to permit the young lady to pass intact; still, the darkness was so visible, and the stairs partook of it so largely, that the gentle image of the oratoire and its delicately faded lady being long since dispelled, nothing less than the gunpowder plot succeeded it in Miss L'Estrange's imagination; and she almost expected to see Guy Fawkes and his lanthorn making their appearance.

Mrs. Kelly, in the meantime, had recrossed the gutter, and whispering to the damsel as she passed—“What are you stanin’ gapin’ there for, you unmannerly being? And so I see you without your shoes and stockins again, after all I said to you!—never heed it a while!”—she seized Miss L’Estrange’s hand, and tucking it under her capable arm, she proceeded to lead her sideways through the hall, informing her, in a low, confidential tone as she did so, “that poor girl, that Sibby, is my own counthrywoman too, that I sent over lately to Mrs. Coghlan; for her heart was broke with the London girls—one worse than an other. This is an innocent crachur as can be, if she’d wear shoes and stockins. She thought all London was lookin’ at her the first day she put them on—it was very natural.”

By this time they had arrived at the foot of the stairs; and Mrs. Kelly, in the weight of her argument forgetting the weight of her person, caused Miss L’Estrange’s slight form a smart concussion by attempting to ascend them by her side. At another moment, Miss L’Estrange would certainly have suppressed any indication of inconvenience from the little accident; but in the present excited state of her nerves, she involuntarily uttered a shriek, much more attributable to her anticipations than her actual sufferings, which startled the good

woman so effectually that she would have caught her in her arms to apply the stimulus of friction to the aggrieved side, if the young lady had not eluded her grasp by springing up the stairs, and taking shelter in the first room, the door of which she found open. And thankful now would she have been to have found it an oratoire. Whatever pity crucifixes, images, or beads might excite in her mind, for their superstition—or whatever abhorrence of idolatry—they would, at least, not have endangered her personal safety ; while, without losing the remembrance that her hostess was guilty of all the superstition and idolatry though without its symbols, she was tempted almost to utter a prayer for safe deliverance from the soiled and squalid refuse of lumber sale-rooms with which she found herself surrounded in Mrs. Kelly's "sitting room."

In a moment or two Mrs. Kelly rejoined her, breathing heavily from the exertion of following her so fast.

"Wont you be sated, my dear?" she asked, dragging from a corner, where it had been sedulously stowed, the only arm-chair the room contained, and placing it behind her. But no sooner had Miss L'Estrange accepted her offer than every creaking joint gave way at once, and had she been a particle less agile or more heavy, she must have fallen to the ground amidst the debris of the fabric.

As it was, she uttered another piercing shriek ; nor was it this time confined to herself alone,—Mrs.

Kelly responded to it in a fine contr'alto—

“ Aough ! Powers of goodness ! ” she shouted, as she hustled over, with her arms extended, apparently to complete the overthrow of her guest, who, however, once more eluded her by springing aside. “ What is this for, at all, at all ? I know the manin’ now,” she said, as she picked up the fragments of the chair, and curiously examined them one by one,—“ I know the manin’ now, why this chair was ever and always stuck behind backs in that corner. And what did I think but it was to spare it, as bein’ the grandest in the room ; and I, not carin’ a pin for arm-chairs, never heeded it, till just now, that I thought you had a right to the best. Well, upon my word, I don’t think that altogether right of Mrs. Coghlan, considerin’ I’m a friend, and might have broke my back. Will you try the sofa, jewel ? ” and she soused up and down on it herself two or three times by way of experiment.

Miss L’Estrange accepted the test, and sat down, literally trembling with terror and agitation ; and being unable even to make an attempt at conversation, an awkward pause of some moments ensued.

Mrs. Kelly’s Irish habits of hospitality, however, did not suffer it to continue long. Rising hastily

from the sofa where she had placed herself beside Miss L'Estrange, with the feeling that propinquity is civility, she began to fumble in her pocket for a key, waddling across the room as she did so towards a buffet cunningly coloured the same as the walls, as if to conceal its existence, and applying the key thereunto, she drew forth a large white delf jar, or crock, covered with the coarsest brown paper, and tied with cord that might have secured a crazy trunk, which placing between her arm and side, she proceeded to take out a dingy ci-devant japanned bread-basket, containing part of a stale loaf and a desert-spoon. Placing these articles on the table, without even looking towards Miss L'Estrange, she went to the room door, which, in Irish fashion, she had not thought of shutting, and uplifting her voice, as if to prove that her lungs were worthy of their casket, she shouted, " Sibby ! Sibby, I say ! do you hear ? bring up a plate and knife in one minute !" then returning to the sofa, as if refreshed by her happy recollection, she instituted inquiries as to Mr. L'Estrange's health, when his daughter had returned from school, and such interesting topics.

In the midst of them she was interrupted by the entrance of Sibby, who, bearing the desired articles on a tray that seemed parent to the bread-basket, moved towards Mrs. Kelly as lightly as her now shackled feet would admit, and whispered, " Will

I bring the cheese, ma'am?—the misthis bid me offer you the double Gloucester."

Mrs. Kelly hesitated a moment between her hospitable feelings, and reluctance to incur so great an obligation, when the former partly overpowering the latter, she turned to Miss L'Estrange, and asked, "My dear Miss L'Estrange, would you like a bit of cheese?—raal double Gloucester?"

Miss L'Estrange, to whom this was the first intimation that the preparations she saw going forward had reference to her, hastily declined the offer, and Mrs. Kelly repeated the refusal to the maid, adding, as she left the room, "Poor Mrs. Coghlan thinks her cheese as great a trate to you, born and bred in England, as it is to me that never set foot in it before. But here's what I flatter myself *will* be a trate to a Londoner;" and not having dreamt of the young lady's declared disinclination to eat extending beyond the cheese, she proceeded only the more vigorously to ladle out, upon the solitary plate, spoonful after spoonful of black currant jam from the white crock; and having cut a thick slice of bread from the stale loaf, and laid it on the edge of the same plate, she said, "Here now! sit over, jewel, and take a mouthful of bread and jam after your long drive; for a long drive it is through them weary streets."

Miss L'Estrange shudderingly declined; whereupon Mrs. Kelly, who excelled in the arts of

pressing, repeated in a tone of high and ironical interrogation, “*No ?* but I say *yes*. What should ail you but you could ate a slice of nice bread and jam ? or any one of your age ? Ra’al, right, homade jam ; not the thrash you get here in your pastry shops. And will I tell you how I come to have it here ? Whethen, I brought it, thinking it id be pleasant for John ; but he’s better, and doesn’t want it now ; and you’re as welcome to it as the flowers in May. There’s plenty more where it came from ; so come—come over like a dear, and take a bite.”

Miss L’Estrange again declared she had had luncheon before she set out.

“Luncheon !” exclaimed the hospitable lady ; “but you don’t call this *luncheon* ? I’ll be bound, you had no such jam as this at your luncheon ? Don’t I know the kind of jam they buy in towns ? Do take a spoonful or two, even without bread ! It’s the wholesomest jam there is !” And in her zeal, she not only brought the plate over towards her guest, but proceeded to hold some of the vaunted jam to her lips.

Miss L’Estrange’s hitherto vague, wavering apprehensions now assumed a more definite form, and she began to fear that she was shut up, not only with a papist, but a mad one, and while she palpitated and hesitated under this fresh alarm, Mrs. Kelly, encouraged by her silence to press

the spoon more closely upon her as she leaned back, suddenly lost her balance, and lady, plate, spoon, and all, were precipitated into the lap of the victim of hospitable thoughts. Of course, another and more piercing shriek than either of the two former was the immediate consequence; and as Mrs. Kelly, whose foot had become entangled in the rusty carpet in her efforts to rise without relinquishing her grasp of the viands, continued to flounder upon her, the shrieks were reiterated in terrifying succession, with the decided object of procuring help.

“Whist! whist! my dear, for God’s sake!” were Mrs. Kelly’s first words on recovering herself; “if you schreech that way, they’ll think somethin’ ails you!” And as Miss L’Estrange, finding herself now released, forgot every other consideration in her wish to escape, she suddenly made a spring towards the door, hastily muttering “good morning” as she did so. Mrs. Kelly, however, caught her by her dress as she passed.

“What’s the matter, now? where are you flyin’ to in such a hurry, my dear? But, indeed, I am afraid things are not to your likin’ here; nor to my own, aither, for that matter; and if I thought that, I’d be sorry to press you to ate or to stay; but still, as I’ve kept you so long, I’m not going to let you go back through all them dirty, dark streets alone, and it almost night already. So here,

just step in here with me for one weeshy moment, and I wont keep you." And without giving Miss L'Estrange time for an answer, she again seized her hand, and drew her into a small bed-room close by, where, snatching at a bonnet and shawl, she was again hurrying out, even while huddling them on with one hand, when Miss L'Estrange, now positively gasping with terror, drew back, and glancing at her watch, said—

"I think, Ma'am, you have mistaken the hour, and—and—I should be sorry—"

"Ah! what! sorry, child?—fiddle-faddle!—what harm will the drive do me? or the walk home afterwards?"

"But it will be so much later then," murmured Miss L'Estrange.

"So it will; but there's all the difference in the world between a beautiful young lady—and that you are, all the world over—and an old hag, who, whatever she *may* have been, has seen her best days. So come your ways, my dear, if you are for going; and, indeed, I don't wish to press you to stay and dine with me, seeing how things are."

The very mention of such an infliction as this would be, made all else appear trifling to Miss L'Estrange; and hastening down stairs, she contented herself with whispering to the servant to be particularly attentive to the slightest touch of the check string, or a call from her, and stood back to allow

Mrs. Kelly to get into the carriage. After some remonstrance, Mrs. Kelly obeyed ; but no sooner had she soused down on the seat in a manner that caused the servant to glance at the springs, than she scrambled out again much more quickly, and, begging Miss L'Estrange's pardon "for one moment," she again hurried up the stairs, and disappeared. Never was poor girl more strongly beset with temptation than now was Miss L'Estrange to drive away and leave her to her imaginings ; but before she could resolve upon what would have been her first attempt at rudeness, Mrs. Kelly re-appeared with a small bundle under her shawl ; which, carefully though furtively cramming into the side-pocket of the carriage next herself, she turned towards Miss L'Estrange to announce that she was ready—and away they drove at last.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS L'ESTRANGE and her unwelcome companion had not proceeded through many streets on their return towards Belgrave Square, when, in one of the poorest and narrowest, their progress was interrupted by a collection of people round some object of temporary interest or curiosity. No sooner did Mrs. Kelly become aware of it, than, leaning as much of her person as possible out of the carriage, she called out in her strong, national accent, "What's the matter? what's the matter? my man! good woman! (as either happened to pass,) has any accident happened? is anybody hurt?" In a moment Miss L'Estrange's servant was at the window, and Mrs. Kelly requested him to inquire what was the cause of the crowd. The servant was already able to answer that it was some poor man who had fainted, but that the people

were now passing on, and the carriage could proceed."

"But what's come o' the poor man? stop! stop! one minute, if you please, Sir,—I see the crachur now, and I dont see any one stoppin' with him, but one poor wretched-looking woman, as bad as himself. Dont go on, if you please, till we see what they're goin' to do with him."

A kinder heart never beat in human bosom than had been bestowed on Rosa L'Estrange; but, while a considerable portion of the pocket-money of the pupils at Ellistone House was regularly sequestered for charitable purposes, such sequestration was not more imperatively impressed on them as a duty, than was the avoidance of all inquiries into its appropriation; and contact or conversation with paupers was foremost in their catalogue of crimes. Miss L'Estrange's docility had caused her to yield in this, as in all else, to those she had been brought up to love, honour, and obey; she had her lesson, accordingly, ready on the instant. "My dear Madam," she said to Mrs. Kelly, "you may depend upon it, the man will be taken proper care of by the proper persons. Had you not better suffer us to proceed?"

"Who are they, my dear? for if I thought that, of course what call for me to meddle? Who are they, dear?"

“ Oh, why really I do not exactly know ; but I know—at least, I’m sure there are such. However, if you choose, I will send the man a shilling by the servant.” And she drew out her purse for the purpose.

“ Stop one minute, my dear,” Mrs. Kelly said, holding down her hand with her own. “ If there really are people to take proper care of this poor man, what need to throw away your money ? but you seem not sure. Are there, or are there not, honey ?” she earnestly repeated. “ For I see no one near him like to do him any good—do, dear, if you please, let me just step out myself and see how it is with them.”

Had Mrs. Kelly proposed to take the coachman’s place on the box, and drive the carriage home, Miss L’Estrange could not have looked more astonished than by this proposal.

“ Go to him ! crush your way through that mob !” she exclaimed. Then recalling her doubts of the lady’s sanity, she said soothingly, though tremulously, “ Nay, you are certainly jesting now. May we drive home ?”

Before answering, Mrs. Kelly again leaned out of the carriage to reconnoitre, and then returning, “ You may drive home, my dear,” she said ; “ I see you’ll be in the fair open streets in a minute now, and your men seem quiet, proper people ; but not

a wink would come on my eyes this night if I left that pale, hungry-looking crachur there, and every one passing by without asking him if he has a mouth.* So here, Misther William,—isn't it William you call him, dear?—just let me out, if you plase, and shut the door, and take your young lady home as fast as you can.”

But it was on some points only that Miss L'Estrange's compassion had been taught to slumber; and that which she had restrained towards the pauper, now found what she considered a legitimate vent towards Mrs. Kelly herself; and however strongly she might have been tempted by the prospect of her own release being thus at once effected, she again resisted the temptation rather than suffer one in the situation she considered Mrs. Kelly to be in, to take such a proceeding. Accordingly, in her turn, seizing hold of her dress in the extremity of her anxiety, she said, “My dear Madam, excuse me, but you do not perhaps know the customs of London; you have no idea how remarkable such conduct would be—how you would be stared at, to say no worse, if you attempted it.

“Stared at! and what harm would that do

* A common form in some parts of Ireland of expressing remissness in offering food.

me, jewel? and more shame for them that would think it a staring matter to do my common duty!"

"But how is it *your* duty, Ma'am? Do you know anything of these people?"

"I know they're God's crachurs, and that's enough. And why is it *my* duty? just for no rason, but because it seems to be no one else's; and if that be the case, it *must* be mine. But if I find it's anybody else's business, I'll engage I wont take it out of their hands; for though we've enough, and to spare, I never wish to deprive others of their right to give also; so let me go, dear! for though I don't know much of the ways of London, they can't be altogether so different from Christians all the world over."

"Hem!" thought Miss L'Estrange; "out peeps the papist bigotry at last!" and deeming it better not to exasperate her on that point, she determined to try another, and accordingly said, "But suppose this man should be an impostor?"

"And suppose he should not, my dear?" retorted Mrs. Kelly.

As this was uttered with the most perfect simplicity and desire for explanation, and as Miss L'Estrange had none ready at the moment, Mrs. Kelly took advantage of her silence to request the

servant once more to open the door ; and as, even before rising from her seat, she had, in her haste, stretched one leg a considerable way down the steps, Miss L'Estrange saw the necessity of relinquishing the grasp she had taken of her clothes, and away she immediately waddled, only looking back to give a good-humoured nod and smile, dragging her shawl up on her shoulders, and searching for a pin for it with as much composure as if she had been crossing her own bog at Lisanore. The crowd gave way before her air of quiet determination, and she was presently lost to sight in the midst of it.

Still, Miss L'Estrange could not resolve to abandon her in a situation so perilous. " Follow her, William ; follow Mrs. Kelly," she said, " and see that nothing annoys her, and ask if I can be of any further assistance."

In about five minutes Mrs. Kelly reappeared, apparently in a most triumphant state ; and coming up to the carriage window, was about to relate the cause of it to Miss L'Estrange, when the latter besought her to step in, as otherwise she would have the whole street for an audience. To this she assented, only making it a condition that she was not to be detained.

" Well, then ; what do you think I found out, my dear, by going ?" she exclaimed, as soon as she

was reseated; “and I’m sure it ought to be a lesson to every one never to pass any one by; for I had no more notion, from Adam down, who this poor man was—no more than you have this minute—but thought it was an Englishman, to be sure, and by coorse a protestant. Well, well!”

And as she paused to philosophize, Miss L’Estrange could only suppose it was some near relative, whom she had found in temporary distress. Not thinking it civil, however, to express this supposition, she merely inquired who it was. Mrs. Kelly, however, requested her to guess; but then, unable to wait for so tedious a process, she exclaimed, “Why, then, he’s a poor *Irishman*!—a poor countryman of my own, and a catholic!”

“And is that all?” Miss L’Estrange coldly asked.

“All!—all!” Mrs. Kelly repeated, staring on her with features working with astonishment; “and is that what you say to such a meetin’? To be sure, I know, or I remember, how you’re of a different way of thinkin’ yourself; but still I thought that there were some feelings that are not of any particular country or religion. But good morning now, my dear, my story’s done, and I’m going back to my poor man!”

Miss L'Estrange's principles and feelings once more struggled, for a moment, within her, but again the latter obtained the victory.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Kelly,—I trust you will?" she said, with an earnest and ingenuous blush,—
"but may I ask if you really know nothing more of this man than what you mention, and this only from himself?"

Mrs. Kelly laughed heartily. "And do you ra'ally think," she exclaimed, "that any one could put on the sweet Irish tongue, so as to desave Mary Kelly, that wasn't born and bred in it?—No, no! the English can do much, but they can't do *that*!"

This Miss L'Estrange admitted; but having always heard that the poor Irish about London were not only the refuse of their own nation, but of human nature, the more certain it became that this person was one of them, the more incumbent did she feel it to be to put her simple companion on her guard. The task she felt to be a difficult and delicate one; she attempted it, however, by asking what story the man had told, or how he had accounted for his destitution. Mrs. Kelly hesitated; and finally said, she would rather not tell, as it might not sound pleasing to Miss L'Estrange.

"To me!" Miss L'Estrange repeated, in great

surprise. "Pray do tell me, for now you excite my curiosity, as well as my anxiety."

Mrs. Kelly then proceeded to inform her that he was a poor man, originally from the north of Ireland, who of late years had held a farm under a gentleman in England, but that, having refused to vote with his landlord against his conscience, he and his family had been turned out to want and starvation, and had begged their way to London, where the man believed he had a brother in tolerable business, but who he found, on arriving, had been dead for some months, and all trace of him lost; that since then, the wanderer's children had all died except two, and that he had himself had a severe fit of illness, from which he was only that day sufficiently recovered to crawl out, with his wife's assistance, to beg for some relief to keep them from actual starvation; that the effort had been too much for him, and he had fainted.

"And you believe this story?" Miss L'Estrange asked, with a look as nearly approaching to indignation as her sweet features could express; for much more readily could *she* have believed that she should herself set out to rob on the highway than that the party she approved could be guilty of such wickedness.

"Believe it?" Mrs. Kelly repeated; "why

wouldn't I believe it, dear? He told it all to me in Irish; and, to my sorrow, I know it often happens on both sides."

Again Miss L'Estrange smiled a cold, but meaning smile; she was much too gentle and polite to say, "You judge others by yourselves;" but not the very smallest doubt crossed her mind of such being the sole foundation for the assertion.

"Well now, my dear, I've no use in keeping you any longer," Mrs. Kelly resumed. "I found the people as mannerly as I could wish; for it was natural for them to laugh a little at a strange language,—sure often and often I laughed myself, when I came over first, at theirs;" and having again, at the recollection, laughed away any little chill that might have extended itself to her from Miss L'Estrange's manner, she said, "And so you needn't be one bit afraid of me, dear; you'll see I'll do well enough with my poor man; once, indeed, for a minute, I was frightened, when he told me it was in a cellar he lived, for fear it was a drunkard he was; but the people explained to me that a cellar here is the same as a garret, and no more food or drink to be got in it; so I was satisfied. And now, my dear, good morning to you!"

And as Miss L'Estrange made no further opposition, the leg was once more stretched out; when

hastily pulling it back a second time, with a sudden, uncertain, but animated expression of countenance, she exclaimed, "Well, I've a great mind to do a very quare thing!"

Miss L'Estrange instantly let down the window, and caught at the check-string. Mrs. Kelly, however, was too intent on her own scheme to observe her.

"*I will!*" she determinately repeated; and Miss L'Estrange only refrained from screaming, by perceiving that, as she said so, she turned from her, and began tugging at the pocket in which she had made her secret deposit. Politeness now induced Miss L'Estrange to turn away her head; but it was unnecessary; for no sooner had she done so, than, round the poke of her summer bonnet, and close up to her face, once more appeared the identical white black-currant-jam-pot of hideous memory. She now really uttered a faint shriek, as she started back from this apparition.

Mrs. Kelly contemplated her and it alternately for a moment in silence, and then said, "You'll think me the quarest being that ever lived when I tell you what I'm about! As I couldn't get you to ate a bit of my nice jam to-day, I just put it up for a surprise for you when you'd get home; and now do you know, but what, as it's the last I have in town, I have a mind to ask you to let me give it

to that poor man instead ; for be he liar or true, protestant or catholic, its beyond all doubt that he has a wheezin' in his chest !”

It is scarcely too much to say that Miss L'Estrange mentally returned thanks when she heard this proposal ; and giving her consent with a cheerfulness that left no doubt of her sincerity, Mrs. Kelly shook her hand affectionately, and saying—“ We don't altogether understand aitch other, I'm afraid ; but there's something about you makes me think we would,” finally took her departure, and Miss L'Estrange, with the strongest sense of relief she had ever experienced, drove away.

Although the alarms and annoyances which Miss L'Estrange had experienced in the course of her unpropitious visit had left her little inclination to put her father's assurances of unlimited credit to the test, having left a brooch at a jeweller's for some trifling repair, with a request to have it done immediately, she felt bound to call for it on her way home ; and the man, being accomplished in his calling, although Miss L'Estrange did not leave her carriage, succeeded in persuading her to carry home a case of tasteful, but intrinsically valueless ornaments, amounting to about a hundred pounds in price, for which sum, notwithstanding all his assurances of wishing to have her “ in his books,” and

so forth, she determined to ask her father on arriving at home, and to pay for them at once; for as Mrs. Ellistone, for obvious reasons, never permitted her young ladies to run in debt, Miss L'Estrange had still in full force the unsophisticated feeling, that while you keep any one's goods without remuneration, so long you are under obligation to them; and she was very proud, as every romantic person is.

It happened that just as she drove up to the door in Belgrave Square, her father arrived there too; and such was the sensation of perfect exemption, at last, from all further adventures, which the sight of him occasioned her, that she felt inclined to spring into his arms. Recollecting the case of trinkets, however, which the jeweller had officiously placed in one of the pockets of the carriage, she hastily put in her hand to take it out, when, not the most piercing of all the shrieks she had uttered that day could be compared to that which now escaped her, as, on hearing a sort of sharp, crumpling crash, she snatched back her hand, and found it streaming with broken eggs! Her spirits were at last wholly overcome; and feeling as if subjected to some Proteus-like persecution from Mrs. Kelly for evermore, her father carried her into the house in a fit of hysteric sobbing.

It was some time before she could compose her-

self sufficiently to give him any account of what had befallen her; and when she did, it was one so wholly though unconsciously exaggerated, as induced him to join in her supposition of Mrs. Kelly's insanity; and expressing a hope that her son, his clerk, might not inherit the disease, he was leaving the room, after thanking her for her compliance with his wishes, and regretting that the visit had not, as he hoped, tended to remove her prejudices, when she earnestly besought him to tell her if no steps could be taken to prevent Mrs. Kelly's pauper friend from spreading stories so injurious to the party to which she had taken it for granted he alluded. He laughed at her anxiety, and assured her that every party was accustomed to such stories, and that everything was fair in love or war.

“War!” she repeated, in horror. “Are we, then, engaged in a civil and religious war so fierce that truth and Christian forbearance are openly rejected?”

“Pooh! my dear; I really cannot undertake to answer you such ridiculous questions,” her father said. “I wish you would have done thinking on subjects so unsuitable to you; but, by-the-bye, there is one much more to the purpose on which I must caution you; it is that of those pests of society denominated ‘genteel beggars,’ who hope to pur-

chase heaven for themselves with other people's money. This poor mad-woman, indeed, does not seem to come under the denomination in any sense of the word ; but, depend upon it, plenty of them will gather about you ; and I assure you, my love, that though it is necessary I should keep up appearances, I have not a single sous to spare at present ;" and he left the room.

CHAPTER V.

IT is impossible to express the astonishment which the concluding words of the last chapter, apparently so carelessly uttered, excited in her to whom they were addressed. It might almost be said that money, as a simple element, had never in her life been thought of by Miss L'Estrange; and as a necessary means for supplying wants, which she only understood as wishes, she had believed it to be inexhaustible; or rather, she had done more, she had thought of it no more than the air she breathed—the light which she enjoyed. Distresses for want of money she had indeed both read and heard of; but so she had of pulmonary complaints, and of persons deprived of sight; but as none of them had ever fallen under her own immediate observation, she considered them alike as painful abstractions with which she, individually, had no

further concern than to relieve those afflicted with them as far as might fall within her power. What, then, must her astonishment, her horror, have been to hear that her father was one of those afflicted beings; for such was, to her, the meaning of his assurance, that, however compelled to keep up appearances, he had not one sous to spare even upon charity! To her unpractised ear and unsophisticated heart this sounded as the confession of the last stage of destitution; not, be it observed, from pure and instinctive compassion, nor yet from cultivated principles of self-denying charity; for the one had been kept dormant by the systematic withholding of objects calculated to excite it, and the other, though preached as a theory, was never permitted as a practice; no, it was solely and simply that, in her natural and habitual high-mindedness, she sincerely believed that the last prerogative the wealthy would resign was the pleasure of *giving*; and the greatest sacrifice which she herself had ever yet been called upon to make to her political principles, was to refrain from offering her purse to Mrs. Kelly, even for her pauper papist.

In her agitated escape from the carriage, and the subsequent explanations, her new purchase, the case of trinkets, had been entirely forgotten; but now the words of her father recalled it to her mind; and, in her acceptance of those words, it seemed to her that she had committed an act which

might deprive him of the means of purchasing food. How to repair it was her immediate consideration; and as the jeweller was one who had grown to "respectability" under the patronage of the pupils of Ellistone House, she doubted not, that, by a small sacrifice, she could prevail on him to take back the purchase; and on this course she determined without a moment's hesitation. Conceiving, however, that the transaction required a personal interview, she was obliged to defer it until next day; and, in the meantime, determined to avoid, as much as possible, wounding her father's feelings by any betrayal of the shock she had received.

"How well he bears up under it himself!" she sighed; "poor dear papa! and how much he must be respected, to have his credit still so good! Yet, surely," and she glanced round the magnificently furnished apartment, peopled by splendid mirrors and valuable paintings, "to my silly eyes, there appears a fortune in this room alone! But it seems he cannot help that. Heigho! I must go and take off my hat."

And so well did she keep her resolution, that if any pensiveness did appear, now and then, in the course of the evening, Mr. L'Estrange attributed it to the exhaustion her spirits had suffered that day, or the want of more society; and he offered to teach her chess.

It would perhaps be impossible to find, in Great Britain at least, a more amiably-selfish man than Mr. L'Estrange. The consequence was, that he was universally popular, without ever exciting or bestowing any deep or lasting friendship. The only hint he had ever received that sorrow or annoyance could extend to him was by the death of his young wife, and his uncle's marriage; but to both events he reconciled himself with nearly equal promptitude, as he found, without reasoning upon it, that neither materially interfered with his immediate enjoyment. Then a young man, and still scarcely past his prime, many wondered he did not marry again; and some even tried to convince him that he ought; but gay, heedless, and good-humoured, he did not see how a wife would add to his enjoyments enough to counterbalance the fuss and trouble she would occasion, and the probable injury to his children, whom he really did love, though he banished them all on system, until they should be grown enough to become his companions, telling himself and the world, however, that it was solely for their good; and obtaining credit for the assertion both from the world and himself, because he sent them each to the most expensive establishments the country afforded, with unlimited orders for education and pocket-money. For the last year he had really anticipated pleasure from his daughter's return home, and he could not conceive

why he now felt disappointed. Unused to think much upon the subject of a young lady's dignity, some fatherly instinct yet whispered him that to bring a set of gentlemen round her as her only society on her return from school would not be taking the best means to support it; and he had, therefore, for two days, magnanimously refrained from asking any to dinner, saying to himself, that surely he could not miss their society when he loved Rosa so much better; besides that, he was "rather fond of women's society," and he wondered why the second evening had proved even heavier than the first.

"Rosa is perfectly lovely," he said to himself, as he laid his head upon his pillow; "she has her poor mother's exquisite complexion, and the same delicate symmetry of figure and limbs—and the little creature has features like mine, only softened and refined, and a thousand times handsomer—and—as for her countenance, I believe she has it from heaven itself, so playful, and sweet, and intelligent—and she sings delightfully, too, and sang at once whenever I asked her, and chattered away, too, about her school, and her politics, and nonsense. I wonder how it is I am not more amused! I almost thought when she came home I should never care to see any one else; but though I really love her more every hour I see her, I don't find that effect follow, somehow. I trust in Heaven I may be able

to get the dear child eligibly settled soon ; she will have fortune enough herself, I suppose, not to make one throw away happiness in search of it, alone, in a husband ; and she would be far happier in a house of her own than in a sort of bachelor's house like this. Heigho ! Women, elegant, high-bred women, must be a restraint in any house, I see ; and a daughter, after all, is not much less trouble in an establishment than a wife !”

CHAPTER VI.

“ ROSA, my love, this will never do !” exclaimed Mr. L’Estrange, as he and his daughter again met at breakfast, the morning after the soliloquy with which we closed the last chapter. “ Upon my soul, I feel for you !”

His daughter, whose imagination was still running on the subject of poverty, was about to offer to resign her egg and toast, and to live on more frugal fare.

“ It was very inconsiderate of me,” he went on, “ to bring you home until I was just setting off for Cheltenham ; in fact, to have taken you up on my way would have been best of all ; but I really did expect to have got off before this,—it must be so horribly dull for you here, after all your merry companions. What, suppose, as you are such a favourite with Mrs. Ellistone, you were to return

to her for a few days, until this Steen makes his appearance?"

"My dear papa, what can you possibly mean?" his daughter exclaimed in reply; and feeling really hurt; for although not unconscious of the change he spoke of, she had not yet even whispered to herself that her father's house, her "home," could be other than paradise to her.

Mr. L'Estrange again explained his meaning. She cast down her eyes, and the colour of her cheek faded into a paler shade as a new idea struck her; she hesitated a moment, and then said, "Surely dear papa—I cannot—be much more expense to you here than there—now that your establishment is formed—unless—unless indeed you intend—"

But before she could proceed further she was struck by the amazement expressed in her father's countenance, as he exclaimed, "Why, what upon earth, girl, are you talking or thinking of? Upon my soul, Rosa, you occasionally startle and astonish me so that I know not what to think. In general, you are as lady-like and refined as a little queen, and then out pops something that sounds so inconsistent and extraordinary, that I'm half tempted to think you are as mad as that poor Mrs. Kelly. What can you possibly mean about saving expense, or not saving it, by your spending a few days with Mrs. Ellistone till I can take you to Cheltenham? I thought, from all I saw, and from the sort of per-

sons who sent their daughters to Ellistone House, that, at least, you would be sure to escape all mean, or grovelling ideas unbecoming your ancestry !”

“ A note from Mrs. Kelly, Ma’am,” said a servant, entering at the moment, and presenting one to Miss L’Estrange. She felt thankful for the interruption, and hastened to break a large, elaborate, red seal, and to read aloud these lines, written in a fine, bold, round, clerklike, but still female, hand, on a sheet of large-sized letter-paper :—

“ MY DEAR MISS L’ESTRANGE,—After I got home last night, and about the time I thought you would be getting there yourself, and finding the few fresh eggs I took the liberty of laying in one of the pockets of the carriage to surprise you, I began to think I had done a very foolish thing, and that there they might stay till the day of judgment, and you never be the wiser ; or if the servants found them, might eat them without ever telling you,—fresh eggs being such a treat in any town of size, and of course especially in London,—so I thought I would just send a little runner with a line, to tell you that you will find every one of them as sound as a bell, although laid in poor old Ireland ; for I have a knack of keeping them that never fails, and which I would give you the receipt of, only for your never having any chance of getting a new-laid egg in London to try it on. Still, as no one

ever knows the chances and changes of this life, and it might come in your way sometime or other ; the whole secret is, never to let one whiff of air get into them—if you do, you may go whistle for them,—for all the buttering hands could butter would not save them, once the poison entered ; that is the reason why you so often see huckster’s buttered eggs no better than they should be. But the way is, to seize the egg warm from the hen,—*warm*, mind ; for whatever is the reason, while the natural heat lasts the air does not get in,—and while they are safe that way, rub your butter over every bit of them,—for one weeshy pore left open would do all the mischief,—and you have your eggs till doomsday. I buttered these with my own hands, so you need not be afraid to set them down before your grandest friends, if you want to make a show ; but indeed I would rather you kept them for yourself, and took one every morning, beat up, fasting, for I think you are too slight for your height. God bless you, my dear. Make my respects and thanks to your father, and excuse all liberties from

“ Your obedient servant,

“ MARY KELLY.”

“ P.S.—If the little blackguard I send with this should offer to stay, or look for anything, just get your servants to wring his ear, and turn him out, for I gave him his breakfast, and promised him his

dinner, for his trouble. Excuse me giving you one little hint as you are a young housekeeper,—don't let your cook be smashing these real country eggs into puddings or pies,—bought eggs are every bit as good for that purpose."

"Now, Sir," said Miss L'Estrange, laying down this document, "I am glad you have an opportunity of judging for yourself, for I dare say you had a lingering suspicion, until now, that I had exaggerated matters."

Mr. L'Estrange admitted himself convinced, and took up the letter as if to realize its contents by ocular demonstration.

"Is it not curious," he said, "that there is not a word ill spelt?"

"You would think so if you heard her pronunciation," his daughter answered.

"But, Rosa, to resume what we were interrupted in by this arrival—" but it was never destined to be resumed; for at that moment a knock at the hall door announced visitors; and the interim between their being shewn to the drawing-room, and the servants coming to say that two young ladies had begged to see Miss L'Estrange, but did not give their names, was fully occupied in conjectures as to who could think of calling at an hour so unusual.

"They are some of those begging bores I spoke

of, Rosa, depend upon it!" Mr. L'Estrange exclaimed, immediately on hearing the announcement. "Now, pray, remember what I told you,—not a single sous, by Heavens, can I command just now! I never was so hard up before,—so be decisive at once, and they'll report accordingly to their gang,—but once yield, and you're in for it. Go now and get them out of the house as quickly as you can; one interview is better than fifty messages through servants. By the way, William must get a hint that it is not his business to announce a letter, like a visitor, by the name it bears, as if you were not capable of ascertaining who it is from. I'm rather afraid we must change him for one not capable of such gaucherie; though I had the highest character of him, and indeed did not observe any deficiency like that before."

"My dear papa, I really think it was merely that William, having been my squire through my adventures of yesterday, thought any missive from Mrs. Kelly required preparation."

"William with you yesterday?—and where, then, was Leeson?—or who remained in the house?"

"I really don't know. William muttered something about Leeson being sent somewhere out of town by you, and that he would come with the carriage."

"True; so he was. But what a real mercy that

there was no one in town to call while you were out! You are aware, Rosa, that it would be a disgrace never to be obliterated if a maid servant were obliged to appear. We must see about this; and if another footman is necessary, hire one immediately," and he left his daughter more mystified than she had ever been by the most abstruse problem she had ever studied in astronomy.

"But it is keeping up appearances still, I suppose," she sighed, as she left the room; just as she had sometimes been in former days, reduced to repeat by rote that which she could not comprehend.

The servant stopped her as she was running up stairs, to tell her that Mrs. Kelly's messenger waited to know if there was an answer.

"An answer!" she exclaimed, in all the horror such an undertaking was calculated to inspire. "I did not know the messenger was waiting. I thought Mrs. Kelly bid him not wait. No, there's no answer, except that I am very much obliged." But ashamed to resist what she considered a hint for a donation, she desired the servant to give the boy a shilling, though reproaching herself for her weakness as she did so.

Before she had got to the drawing-room door, however, the servant followed her, and informed her that the boy refused to take it, saying he had been already paid by Mrs. Kelly; and added, that

he believed he was nearly blind, for he had queer white specks on both eyes, and seemed to grope his way, and to jostle people as he passed. Miss L'Estrange's self-reproach took a new direction, and mingled with it was a sudden, an unwonted, an agonizing pang of compassion.

“Oh, follow him !—follow him, William,” she said, “and make him take this half-crown. Tell him it is not for the message, but for his blindness,—or, stay, better not say that, perhaps, if he did not speak of it,—say for—for a reward for his honesty,” and she stood on the stairs awaiting the man's return with such anxiety as one more accustomed to see and to relieve human sufferings systematically, might not have felt ; and then hearing, with deep disappointment, that all trace of the boy was lost, with a heavy heart she turned towards the drawing-room to fulfil her ungracious, and, to her, unaccountable task.

CHAPTER VII.

HAD Miss L'Estrange been a few years older, or a little more practised in the world, she would, doubtless, have entered the drawing-room, to meet the beggar bores, with that cold, but determined civility of manner which is instinctively assumed when conscious of determined incivility in substance; but, as she was only eighteen, and moreover, particularly unhackneyed, she felt so like a criminal in her intentions, that she had advanced half way up the room without raising her eyes from the carpet, and anxiously wondering in what form her visitors would commence operations, when she suddenly heard a rush towards her, and felt herself clasped in the arms of one, while the other kept softly, but sentimentally, pressing her hand. In a moment she underwent a total revulsion of feelings and ideas, and almost of physical sensations.

“Frances! Susan!” “Beloved Rosa!” were the sounds that seemed alone capable of expressing the sensations of each as they exchanged embraces, and contrived to get to the sofa almost without untwining their arms.

“And so here you really are, Rosa, at last! and queen of a perfect palace!” exclaimed the elder, though shorter, of the two sisters, glancing with critical, but admiring eyes round the room.

“Yes,” she answered, faintly; “but when did you return from the Continent?—and how did you find me out?”

“Why, to find out Mr. L’Estrange, of Belgrave Square, was not an Herculean labour; nor did it require any magical exertion of intellect afterwards to ascertain whether his fair daughter was at his house,” answered the young lady, who seemed, either by the consent of her sister, or in right of seniority, to take all the active parts both of conversation and embracing on herself. “For our humble selves,” she continued, “we only arrived last night; so you see we have lost no time, love.” And another embrace claimed and acknowledged gratitude for this promptitude.

“How long will you stay? Where are you going?—not, I hope, immediately to the north?” Miss L’Estrange asked.

“Why, as to what we are going to do, we scarcely know ourselves; and, I may say, have

waited to form any plans for the summer, until we should know yours; but I should say we are certainly not going to the north;—you know, of course, that poor papa is dead?”

“No!” Miss L'Estrange exclaimed, in a tone of much more interest than the manner of the announcement seemed to claim.

“Oh, yes,” the young lady said, now casting down her eyes, “for more than six months. How is it possible you did not see it in the papers?” and she fixed a penetrating, an anxious glance upon her young friend.

“I really don't know—it must have escaped me by some accident.”

“But you are as great a politician as ever?” she asked, and with the same look of intense inquiry.

“Not a politician—you must not call me so any more—papa thinks it quite a term of reproach, but I trust——”

“What, then, is Mr. L'Estrange not a Tory himself?” she exclaimed, interrupting Miss L'Estrange, in her eagerness.

“Oh, yes, certainly; but he seems to think ladies—young ones, at least—have nothing to do with the subject.”

“I must say, so far I agree with him.”

“Frances! you who were so stanch!—so much beyond even me!—for while I would only keep

the papists from political power, you would exterminate them by fire and sword !”

A slight blush passed over the young lady’s cheek, and, with the slightest degree of hesitation, she answered—

“ Oh, so I am still, perfectly stanch ; but really the subject is so abstruse—”

“ Not more so than religion.”

“ Why, no—perhaps not.” And again the same faint shade was visible in her cheek, and the same glance of furtive, but intense inquiry cast from her eyes. “ Mais revenons,” she said, abruptly resuming her gay tone and manner. “ I wrote to you myself at the time poor papa died, and my letter must have been lost. He died at Naples, and we have been wandering about with Charles ever since.”

“ And where are you staying now ?”

“ Why, I blush to say, at the Clarendon !”

“ Why blush ?”

“ Because, my dear, we are as poor as paupers—that is, Sue and I ; but you need not tell the world so, till it tells you. Papa left every penny he possibly could to Charles, who is as magnificent as a prince, and franks us everywhere, but still you know it does not do to encroach too far.”

Miss L’Estrange involuntarily cast down her eyes with the most painful feeling she had ever experienced in her life. It seemed to her as if poverty had, all at once, beset her in every most

frightful form. What would she not have given to have assured her friend, at this moment, that her fortune was at her disposal; however, she only sighed and remained silent.

“Nay, never sigh for it, my fair friend,” cried the lively lady. “It never costs me a sigh, I assure you! You’ll see we shall do very well; we have kind friends, accomplishments, and, *tant soit peu* of prettiness, though I grant it profanation to name it in such a presence. Still, happily, there are eyes in the world which, too weak to gaze on the brilliancy of the sun, admire the humble satellites. Such be our acknowledged position henceforth, for to say simple truth, Rosa, you have turned out the very loveliest creature I ever beheld.”

A deep, ingenuous blush, and almost a start of astonishment, with a muttered disclaimer, was the reply to this speech.

“Nay, my dear, you know young ladies don’t often flatter each other; and, although I am some six or seven years your elder, still I am not *hors de combat*, so may be supposed not wholly indifferent on the subject. De plus, I may assume to be capable of judging a little in this matter, having seen the belles of many countries; but come, I see you are as free from vanity as when we left you in your school-room two years ago.”

“I fear not,” Miss L’Estrange answered, inge-

nuously, and with the scrupulousness of perfect truth, that test of genius as of virtue.

Miss L'Estrange, when her friend pronounced her free from vanity, disclaimed the praise, for she was conscious that three times in her life her little heart had fluttered perceptibly at praises of her beauty. The first was when her brother had nodded approvingly; the second when her father had said she "would do, in spite of her politics," at least, as soon as she understood him; and the third was, when her friend just now pronounced her the loveliest of all the lovely creatures she had seen; for one of the penalties which perfect truth must pay in a corrupted world is, to be frequently too late in doubting it in others.

"No?—not quite so free from vanity, eh? And who, then, has had the happiness of wakening it? How long have you left Ellistone House, Rosa?" asked her friend; and again there was an earnestness, an anxiety, in the manner of the inquiries that evinced a deeper interest than the subject seemed to call for. To Miss L'Estrange, however, it only bore the semblance of affection.

"Only two days since," she answered. "And can you, Frances, ask who has wakened my vanity? Had it been dead, instead of sleeping, was not your voice alone sufficient to kindle the Pro-

methean spark?—but, as you said, let us drop the subject for ever.”

“What, then, dearest, are your own plans? Do you remain in London all the summer?”

“Why, no—I believe not; papa talks at least of going to Cheltenham, but really——”

“To Cheltenham?—happy mortal!

‘When pleasure begins to grow dull in the east,
You but order your wings, and fly off to the west.’”

Again Miss L'Estrange's eyes were cast upon the ground. Her impulse was to say to her impoverished friends, “Come with us!” but this she believed she durst not venture, so she changed the conversation, and a series of questions and answers, such as usually pass between young ladies who have been separated after years of intimacy, ensued; and Miss L'Estrange related, in undiminished vividness, her adventure of the day before, and received all the sympathy she expected, with sundry cautions against promiscuous acquaintances; and at last the visitors seemed to think it time to move.

“If you must go now,” Miss L'Estrange said, “I can set you down at your hotel; for I am going out, and had ordered the carriage before you came.”

“Oh, thank you, that will just do; for though we crept here in the early morning, I know it is

not comme il faut for ladies to walk the streets of London ; and alas ! alas ! for *our* carriage !”

Miss L'Estrange hastily left the room ; and having equipped herself for her drive, she returned with the doomed case of trinkets in her hand, more than ever confirmed in her determination to repair the error she had committed.

“ What pretty things are those, Rosa ?” asked her friend, the moment she appeared, and, taking them from her hand, fell into ecstasies at their beauty and style. “ What are you going to do with them ?—not to change them, I hope ? You cannot, surely, find anything prettier, or more becoming to you—they are quite foreign ! What are you going to do with them ?”

Miss L'Estrange hesitated for a single moment, and then said, firmly, “ To return them.”

“ To return them !—are they imperfect, then ? What a shame !—Who did you get them from ?”

“ There is no shame, except to myself ; I threw away a hundred pounds uselessly yesterday, and I am going to endeavour to recover it to-day.”

“ Ho ! ho !—so, then, ‘ *papa*,’ that *rara avis*, that prince of *pères*, turns out no better than other people’s *papas* after all ?” and again the penetrating glance appeared.

“ Papa is as kind and indulgent to me as he ever was,” his daughter replied, with earnestness ; “ he never saw or heard of these ; but you must

learn to give me credit for a little common sense, now I have left school. I remember," she added, smiling, "you used to consider me a fool."

"A child,—a dear, intelligent, innocent child, perhaps," replied her friend, colouring; "and I would rather see you so still, than—than—but it is impossible Rosa L'Estrange can have become *stingy*?"

"I hope so."

"Nay, then, surely, I trust, still less *a saint*?"

"I fear so."

"Come, come! what is it, then? You used to have no reserves when you were the dear child you spoke of."

"But, then, you know the proverb," Miss L'Estrange said, smiling.

"What? some stuff about woman and reserve? but that does not mean to one's intimate *female* friend."

"But as I have no other yet, and wish to prove myself a woman still," she said, endeavouring to parry, by playfulness, the inquisitorial examination which yet she excused in consideration of the intimacy of friendship. And it was a relief to her therefore when, at that moment, a servant summoned her from the room, by the emphatic whisper, that "there was a person who wished to see her immediately;" and, outside the door, she found her father standing, in evident impatience.

“Why, who upon the face of the earth are these people, Rosa?” he cried, the moment she appeared. “Are they those cursed bores I spoke of? and if so, why do you suffer them to hang on in the house so that I cannot get into the room?”

“My dear papa, they are the Miss Wiltons, daughters of Sir Gustavus Wilton, and my most intimate friends. They are just returned from the Continent with their only brother, Sir Charles Wilton.”

“*That*, indeed, is another story!” Mr. L’Estrange pronounced slowly, and almost bowing, with pleased surprise; for, although a gentlemanly man, he encouraged in himself, if not affected, too much of a certain nationality for perfect polish. “I heartily congratulate you, my dear child; I really do,” he said, in a more natural tone. “I pitied you from my soul, and was just coming in to tell you I had got a box at the opera for this evening; there’s something worth hearing there still; better at least than sitting alone at home; and now perhaps your young friends will join you. Come in and present me. But I say, Rosa!” as she was opening the door, “is Sir Charles Wilton a married man?”

“No,” she answered, and entered the room with a heightened colour. Mr. L’Estrange was presented; and no trace was visible of his late desire to have the ladies turned out of the house. On the contrary, although he had intended leaving

to his daughter to make the proposal of their accompanying her to the opera, there was something so encouraging in Miss Wilton's manner that he felt no fear of offending in presuming so far himself; and, being made bold by success, he proceeded even to invite them to join an early dinner with Rosa. To this, however, they demurred. Sir Charles Wilton had, they said, promised to decline every invitation for that day, rather than leave them to dine at the hotel without him, and it would be but an ungracious return to leave him to dine there alone. The remedy was obvious. Mr. L'Estrange said, if that was, indeed, the only obstacle, he would wait on Sir Charles immediately, leave an invitation for him to join the party, and trust to Miss Wilton for making his excuses for the liberty.

Although apparently shocked at the blunder she had committed, Miss Wilton laughed frankly, and said, "Since you are so kind, then, I know I can promise for Charles, his highest ambition being to make yours and Rosa's acquaintance," and an arch, expressive glance towards the latter again summoned the heightened colour to her cheek, by recalling some fairy castles openly discussed in the days of girlish intimacy and child-like innocence.

Mr. L'Estrange was then leaving the room, highly satisfied with his guests, his daughter, and

himself, when, in taking his hat from the table, his eye was attracted by the case of sparkling bijouterie which lay open.

“What very pretty things!—who is the happy owner?” he asked, probably conceiving them a continental souvenir to his daughter.

No one answered for a moment; and then Miss Wilton, looking from the daughter to the father, said, “Why, I believe, it is uncertain who may claim them in the end; at present they are like the tomb of Mahomet, wavering between heaven and earth.”

“How do you mean?”

“Why, yesterday they were destined for an angel, to-day they seem doomed again to some mere mortal. How puzzled he looks! Nay, then, in simple phrase, Rosa purchased them yesterday to adorn her very fair self, and to-day she has determined to return them to the hapless wight who has been dreaming all night that he had sold them.”

“Why are you going to return them, Rosa?” her father asked, carelessly, still contemplating them. “Do you not like them?—to me they look exceedingly pretty.”

“Oh, so they do to her, and to us all,” Miss Wilton answered; “but Rosa thinks them too dear.”

“Oh! I am no judge whatever in that way.—how much did they cost?”

His daughter cast down her eyes in self-condemnation, as in a low voice she stammered out, "A hundred pounds. But it was before—" and she stopped, and, raising her eyes to her father's face, endeavoured to make him understand her apology.

Mr. L'Estrange, however, at all times unskilled in reading countenances, did not take any particular notice of hers at that moment, but went on, appealing to Miss Wilton, in the same heedless tone. "Do you know, they don't strike me as dear. However, as I said, I really am no judge further than of what pleases my eye, and these do particularly; however, do as you please, love; I give you *carte blanche* in such matters, you know," and he was again leaving the room, when Miss Wilton, who, at a glance, understood the characters of both father and daughter infinitely better than either of them did of the other, and who was laudably desirous to guard her young friend from acquiring habits of unbecoming economy or self-denial, hastened to inform him that it was not that Rosa thought the articles not worth the price, but merely too dear for her ideas of prudence.

Mr. L'Estrange unaffectedly said, "I really do not understand you."

His daughter again endeavoured to fix his eyes:—this time she succeeded so far as that he exclaimed aloud, "What is it, Rosa? I see you are

trying to convey something to me, but, for my soul, I don't understand your looks."

The poor girl now, once more, cast her eyes on the ground, as if afraid others might, and changed colour rapidly. Her father's attention became arrested; he also cast down his eyes for a moment, in deep consideration; and then, as an idea suddenly occurred to him, his whole countenance lightened up with glee, and, as if afraid to trust to his guess, he exclaimed—

"Is it possible, Rosa, I have made out what you are at? Can it possibly be what I said to you yesterday and to-day about beggars?"

"My dear papa!"

"Nay, it is, then!" he exclaimed, joyously; and laughing in a manner of which no one could doubt the sincerity, he turned to Miss Wilton, and related what had passed, adding, however, "Since she is such a baby, we must only manage her accordingly, until she gets more accustomed to life,—therefore, my fair daughter, I *command* you to wear these to-night as a present from me; and if your friends the Miss Wiltons would honour us so far, I should beg to commit you to their guidance for all such matters in future, assuring you that my credit is good enough to support my daughter!" and he smiled, bowed, and withdrew, while Miss L'Estrange came to the conclusion that, amongst

the variety of languages she had learned at Ellistone House, fashionable English phraseology was not included.

In the meantime, the moment the door closed behind Mr. L'Estrange, Miss Wilton exclaimed, "My dearest Rosa, what a delightful man is your father! Why did you never tell us he was young, handsome, and agreeable?"

"*Young?*" his daughter repeated, laughingly.

"Yes; positively young, for a father, and a widower!—Why he looks little above forty, don't you think so, Susan?"

"*Decidedly,*" replied the silent young lady; and there was something in the cool but emphatic manner in which the decision was given that fixed her sister's keen glance on her face for half a minute.

"Perhaps you think him like his son?" she asked, in a low expressive tone, and with the slightest possible approach to a sneer on her lip. There seemed but little in the words, yet the young lady darted back a quick indignant glance, as she answered, "Not the very least."

"You knew my brother, then?—you met William?" Miss L'Estrange inquired.

"Oh, yes; at Florence we met him several times," Miss Wilton answered. "He was quite run after there. But if we are to return to an early dinner, I fear we must fly now, being still un-

packed. Perhaps, as you are condemned by a tyrant father to wear these golden fetters, you will not now choose to drive out?"

"Oh, yes; the carriage is at the door. I shall set you down, and, giving you time to dress, shall call and take you up again, if you will then wait here for my hasty toilet."

"And Charles?"

"Oh true; I forgot Sir Charles Wilton at the moment. Then I must only beg you to return to me as quickly as you can."

And even Miss Wilton did not venture further.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE two young ladies, acknowledged as the dearest and most intimate friends of Miss L'Estrange, were, as she had said, the daughters of Sir Gustavus Wilton, a Roman-catholic baronet, whose property lay in the north of England. Having lived almost entirely abroad during the early part of his life, and spending the remainder of it in low dissipation on his retired estate, his religion, being of consequence to no one but himself, was little known, and less cared for, by the world at large ; consequently, when his sister, who had conformed to the *established* church of her husband, seeing that their father's house was no longer a proper home for her nieces, growing into womanhood, took the motherless girls under her own charge, and placed them at Ellistone House as a sort of "parlor boarders," to acquire, late as it might be, some of

those accomplishments of which they had been hitherto cruelly deprived, no difficulties were made about receiving them, and the young ladies themselves found their advantage in concealing that they were not of the religion of all around them; and when, soon after their aunt died, and their father coldly commanded them to continue where they were, they felt it still more incumbent on them to make themselves friends of whomsoever fell in their way. Miss L'Estrange, the lovely, innocent, highminded, and enthusiastic daughter of the wealthy widower banker seemed the most promising of all the varieties they met, and on her shrine, accordingly, they bowed themselves.

Nothing, however, could be more different than were the two sisters in almost every point, both of character and personal appearance. The eldest, Frances, quick and intelligent by nature, and rendered shrewd, keen, and unprincipled by circumstances, possessed passions so strong as to be supposed incapable of any, because she laughed at the trifles that ruffled those of others, and left no trace behind; while she felt that if hers were moved, it must be by the fierce hurricane, which, in searching the depths of the ocean, overthrows everything in its course. Friendship she had never felt, and never could feel. If capable of it by nature, circumstances had so degraded her feelings that, to

maintain, or to attain, a place in society, and to cling to whoever might assist her to it, was the only interest she could feel in a female friend. And with this view she caressed and flattered the lovely, innocent child on whom she fixed as proper to that object, and, for two years, contrived to persuade her that no one ever did, or ever could, love her as well; and, moreover, that she herself never did, and never ought, to love any one else as well.

Love, in its usual acceptation, Miss Wilton had felt once; and it was, as her character promised, deep, lasting, and concentrated; and with this passion as an object, a gay and animated temper, practised self-control, a slight touch of talent, which just preserved her from vulgarity—a person, mince, debonaire, and, as she said herself, *tant soit peu*, pretty, with admirable taste in dress, ensured her as much admiration as served her ulterior purposes.

Miss Susan Wilton's portrait will require fewer touches. Shallow alike in mind and feeling, she could conceive no means of seconding her sister's views of settling themselves in life at once so simple and agreeable as marriage; and this became, therefore, the sole occupation of her thoughts and existence. Utterly unambitious herself, however, she would have occasionally committed sad blunders, but for the vigilance of that shrewder sister, in whose hands she was only prevented from being

a perfect puppet by a peevish discontented temper, which, now and then prompting her to rebel and seek happiness in her own way, without giving her energy to persevere, had hitherto served no other end than to give her sister the trouble of sometimes managing, and always despising her. At a first glance the younger sister might have been pronounced to possess personal attractions of a higher class than those of the elder, being tall, slight, and rather elegant-looking, with regular features of a sentimental cast, to which the inanity of her countenance, and indolence of her manner, seemed to correspond ; but while they were commended and forgotten, her elder sister's were criticized and admired.

At the time that Miss Wilton was weaving her webs around the widower banker's little daughter, accepting expensive proofs of her childish affection, encouraging her in her silly enthusiasm about ancestral castles and Irish rebels, and patiently looking forward to the reward of her labours in the removal of her "dear little protégée" to become mistress of one of the handsomest houses in Belgrave Square, her only brother, Mr. Charles Wilton, a year or two older than herself, was finishing his college-course at Oxford. Selfishly vain of his only son, Sir Gustavus had yielded to the boy's entreaties to be sent to Eton ; and, depending on his family pride, confirmed by a knowing look

and smile from the boy, to preserve him in, or restore him to, the ancient faith when desirable, he troubled himself but little which he affected in the meantime; and Mr. Charles Wilton, like his sisters, passed for a protestant with the few who troubled their heads about the matter.

Although but little intercourse had hitherto existed between the sisters and their brother, Miss Wilton, in her perspective sagacity, knew that the time must come, and might not be far distant, when they must look to him either as their friend or enemy. Ready-money they knew their father had not to leave them; and as Mr. Wilton's habits were expensive, it was as well to conciliate as compel him to pay them whatever portions their father might bequeath. Besides, Miss Wilton was far above all trifling family huffs and piques; she was not hurt, as sisters in general might be, at her brother's estrangement and indifference. His affection, hitherto, could have availed her little; and she was perfectly aware that, let brothers and sisters feel towards each other as they may, nature has linked them so closely together, that, unless still closer links are formed, they rise or fall, more or less, by each other's respectability or want of it. Considering matters in this rational point of view, it occurred to her that it would be no bad speculation to bring about a match between the banker's only daughter and the baronet's extra-

vagant son ; and she went so far as not only to impart her wishes to the smiling, blushing girl, as the impulse of sisterly affection and devoted friendship, but wrote to her brother to consider them as the dictates of worldly prudence. For a long time she received no more answer from the one than from the other. At length she received a laconic epistle from her brother, informing her that he should be in London on a certain day, when he would drive down to Ellistone House ; and that she might exercise her ingenuity or discretion in bringing about a meeting between him and the young lady she spoke of. But he had demurred too long. Before the appointed day arrived he was summoned to attend what was supposed to be the death-bed of his father ; and, although the old gentleman partially recovered, it was only to gather his family around him, and betake himself, with them, to the Continent,—*he* said, for the benefit of his health ; but others said, not less for the benefit of his purse ; an opinion which appeared to receive confirmation from his son's consenting to be of the party, and disposing of his stud and fashionable tilbury.

From that time forth Miss L'Estrange had lost sight of her self-constituted friends until the meeting we have commemorated ; but her grateful, guileless heart had remained constant to the portraits they had imprinted in it ; and no effort of

expanding judgment was sufficient to counteract the effect of absence in maintaining her in the undoubting confidence of their being faithful sketches.

“ Well, Susan, give me credit for having judged rightly for once, at least !” Miss Wilton exclaimed, in a high state of exultation, as, having been set down by Miss L’Estrange, she and her sister shut themselves into the same dressing-room at the Clarendon Hotel. “ Nay, don’t ring for Celine, for a moment. I have a thousand things to say ; and one or two cautions to give you.”

“ Cautions !—why, one would suppose I did not know how to eat my dinner without your cautions.”

“ No, no ; but do just listen to me. You will admit, yourself, that I hit off to a nicety the time for our return ?—one week more, and it might have been too late—Rosa might have been lost to us for ever.”

“ How ?—or why ?”

“ I mean as a sister-in-law ; and, let me tell you, the more I see, the more I am convinced it would have been an irreparable loss.”

“ Sister-in-law !—what is it you mean ?”

“ Simply that she will be Charles’s wife as surely as I shall not ; she blushes already at the recollection of former visions, and nothing could tend more to realize them.”

“ Former visions ?”

“ Yes ; but I forgot you were not in that little secret between her and me.”

“ *A l'ordinaire.*”

“ Nay, now, dear Susan, you know that is not a true charge. But what I want to caution you about is this : you see Rosa is as mad as ever about rebels and papists ; so, for Heaven's sake, as you value the happiness or respectability of the whole family, do not drop a hint of our religion !”

“ What is it ?” Susan drily asked.

“ Oh—why—in fact, you know, there is really very little difference, except in forms ; and although on the Continent, and especially while poor papa lived, it was better to do in Rome as Rome does, here, where almost all the better class are of the Established Church, and where we were ourselves supposed to be so formerly, we had—don't you think—better continue so ?”

“ I always did ; but you know you thought differently.”

“ Oh ! that was because Charles was a little uncertain how his tenants' interest would go, and one or two things about the government ; but he has, I think, decided ; and, at all events, Rosa's principles and nonsense will turn the scale.”

“ To what ?”

“ Oh ! Toryism and Protestant ascendancy, to be sure ; but take care, now, Susan, for our lives are in your hands,—we are literally on the very

brink of a precipice—the crisis of a fever—we have, I may say, risked all on one cast, and as we win or lose, we go forth into the world as gentlewomen or paupers.”

“Nay, not quite so bad as that, I flatter myself.”

“No ! what less, or more ?”

A cold sneer was the only answer to this question.

“What ! harping still on your having wanted a few weeks of being of age when you signed that deed of acquittal ? Depend upon it, Susan, you are misinformed about that ; and even if you were not, the world would cry shame on you for availing yourself of it.”

“And, if I am misinformed, why has Charles since endeavoured to prevail on me to repeat my signature ? and why have you always prevented my doing so ?”

“Because it was unnecessary.”

“Nay, fool as you treat me, that answer will not do for both my questions ; and as to the world crying shame upon me, I think it would be much more likely to cry shame on Charles, for prevailing on his sisters to sign a deed of acquittal to him for fortunes of which they never received a penny.”

“Yes ; but you know the reason, my dear Susan ;—you know that the estate was so dipped that the creditors would instantly have seized and

sold it for so little that we certainly should never receive a penny, had not those deeds of ours enabled him to raise money to satisfy the most pressing claims, on papa's death; and you know how generously he has behaved to us ever since."

"That just depends on whether he thinks I have power over him or not; you know very well he wanted to leave us on a miserable pension in Italy, while he returned to England, and would have done so only for your making *me* insist on coming; and to me, whom he treats with such contempt at other times, he yielded then, against his own judgment! Nay, Frances, you need never again seek to persuade me I cannot recover my fortune."

"Recover your fortune! why, you speak as if Charles were a swindler, and you an heiress of four or five thousand a-year, instead of a pittance of three thousand pounds, which he has, we may say, borrowed from you."

"Yes, borrowed, if you will, without bond, or interest, or acknowledgment of any sort! Frances, even I know the whole transaction to be so odd that it is not possible but that you, who are so shrewd and worldly, and think so ill of Charles yourself, must have had some object in submitting to it."

"Hah! what do you mean by that? Those are neither your own words nor ideas, Susan. Has

that wretch—that villain—that attorney-parson—dared to——”

“ I know not whom you are pleased to so designate,” Susan said, interrupting the impetuous burst that might have given her the information she sought.

“ I mean,” Miss Wilton continued, still vehemently, but now more collectedly ; “ I meant the man whom, his lordly father, not allowing him to bear his name, bound as a petty scrivener, and when he proved himself too bad for that, crammed into orders and a curacy, from which, also, being expelled in disgrace, he now seeks to live by doing jobs upon the Continent that no one else will do ! Do you not yet recognise the likeness ? I mean, then,” she said, with an ironical bow, “ your late admirer, *Mr. Joseph Phelan !*”

Miss Susan Wilton, without answering a word, rose and left the room ; for a moment her sister could not command herself sufficiently to follow her, for it was only towards her that she occasionally gave vent to her well-restrained, but impetuous temper. The occasion, however, was, as she had said, critical ; and, suddenly subduing herself, she sprang towards the bed-room door, in time to prevent her from closing it, and struggling to take the hand that was withheld in cold and sullen indignation—

“Come, come, Susan,” she said, “how very trifling, how very silly is this quarrelling! I beg your pardon if I have said anything to offend you; but you know I could not guess it would. I thought that affair not only over, but that Charles, in pointing out to you its disadvantages,—its ruin, I will say,—made you fully acquainted with the gentleman’s position in society, and familiar with the epithets I applied to him.”

“I equally despise and disbelieve the insinuations of each,” was the cold reply.

“Why, Susan?”

“Because I saw you both, for some time, most intimate with Mr. Phelan; and then, when you became afraid of losing my fortune between you, it was convenient to carry me off, and revile him into the bargain.”

“When the deeds he drew up in virtue of his *first* profession were signed, we had no further occasion for his services.”

“Pardon me; it was not till *after* that that I became even acquainted with him. You should remember, fools have good memories. And when Charles found him the disgraceful character you speak of, why did he not forbid him his house at once, and denounce him openly, instead of cautioning me in deep mystery? and then, because I did not at once swallow all he told me, carry us

off from Naples at a moment's notice! I know, perfectly, you are one, or both, afraid of him for some reason or other."

Miss Wilton sank back on her seat; for a moment overwhelmed with this random shot; she rallied instantly, however, and fixing her penetrating eyes on her sister's countenance, asked, in a tone of tremulous anxiety—

"Did he tell you so, Susan?" but added, quickly, "did he add calumny and falsehood to his other crimes?"

"No, he did not; but I think it myself," Susan replied at once; and her sister was satisfied with the tone and manner.

"Then you really regret the termination of that affair, Susan?" Miss Wilton asked.

Susan hesitated for a moment, and then answered, sullenly, as if unwilling to give her sister the satisfaction—

"No, I cannot say I do, particularly."

"Why, as you so readily recovered your love for William L'Estrange, who, at least, was a gentleman, I should hope this wound would not be more lasting! But tell me, now, Susan," she continued, endeavouring to subdue a certain ironical tone in which she could not, at all times, prevent herself from indulging, even when doubtful of indulging it with impunity, "would not Mr. L'Es-

trange, senior, be a better *parti* than either of them?"

"Mr. L'Estrange?"

"Yes! I suppose such an idea never occurred to you?—*Decidedly!*" and she imitated, with admirable precision, the tone in which Susan had given her verdict on him in the morning.

Susan pouted for a moment, turned away her face, and then said—

"I thought you intended him for yourself; you have often said so—laughingly, I confess,—but half jest and whole earnest, I suspect."

"And yet you would seek to rival me? Naughty, treacherous sister! No!" she said, more seriously, "marriage is not my rôle;—I intend to trust to you and Charles for making the fortunes of the family in that way; and, in catering for you both, I have no time to look about for myself in return. When I succeed, you will each give me a seat in the chimney-nook!"

"Ah! I know why!—you are certainly more constant than I am, Frances!"

Miss Wilton's countenance instantly underwent a change it had not yet exhibited, and indignation and contempt shot in one short but furious glance from her eye; once more, however, gulping down whatever feelings agitated her, she rose hastily, and said—

“Come! ring for Celine! it is quite time we should dress!”

“Yes, the moment you have satisfied your own curiosity. But I will be put off no longer; and now that I have you in my power——”

“How do you mean in your power?”

“Nay, don’t look so terrified; I only mean, to pop you over the brink of the precipice you spoke of; but I vow I will cross myself publicly after dinner to-day, and ask why you and Charles do not also, unless you tell me what happened between you and your beloved, which nearly cost you your life at the time, and has made you indifferent to all mankind ever since. By-the-bye, now I recollect, he is an Irishman, and a college friend of the two L’Estranges; and I am convinced that is the true secret of your anxiety to return, ever since papa’s death set you free!”

Perhaps there is not in nature a more exquisitely torturing sensation than that of having the tender spot of the soul, round which one has carefully woven the thread of secrecy, gradually laid bare by the wanton bungling of an idiot. Miss Wilton, with all her self-command, winced so sensitively under the infliction, that she was unable even to attempt any defence, and would have seemed almost converted into marble, but for a severe twitching of a nerve just over her left eye.

Her sister perceived her situation, and although

she never laughed, approached as near to it as she ever did, while she cried out, "I vow I am right! I have touched the Stoic! Well, tell me all about it, Frances; what you quarrelled about, and how you mean to make it up, and I will drop the subject."

Miss Wilton remained silent for a moment longer; then quietly, but energetically, grasping her sister's arm, she said, "Susan, answer me once for all! Have you entered upon any plan for yourself in defiance of Charles and me? Is Mr. Phelan coming to England? or have you had any communication with him since you parted at Naples?"

"None; no, none!" Susan said, decidedly, terrified, at once, from her unwonted animation, by the solemnity of her sister's manner, and the pale rigidity of her features and countenance.

"Then you are willing to act with us as we agreed upon?—indeed, pledged ourselves to?"

"I deny that I pledged myself to anything particular," Susan said again, relapsing into sulkiness; "but I do intend to act with you as long as I think you treat me fairly; and I promise you to do nothing rash about Charles and my fortune, until I see how he intends to act by me."

"Then listen to me; never again goad me on the subject you have just alluded to. You see yourself I cannot bear it; nor could I answer for the

consequences it might entail ; and yet, a thousand, and ten thousand times would I prefer your inflicting this agony upon me every moment of my existence, than that you should give the remotest hint of it to others ; it would, in fact, alter our whole position with the L'Estranges, and defeat every object we have in view. I utterly deny your absurd conjecture ; but others might believe it, and it would, as I said before, effectually ruin all, as well Charles with Rosa, as you with Mr. L'Estrange. And now, once more, ring for Celine. We have not even heard yet whether Charles is come in ; he was not, when we arrived, for I saw Mr. L'Estrange's note and card upon the table. Hand me the eau-de-Cologne ;—my head aches sadly."

And although Miss Susan Wilton did not exactly perceive how such serious consequences as her sister threatened were to ensue to all the family from its being known that she had been in love, it being no unusual affair for her to be mystified and overpowered by her sister's eloquence and impetuosity, she mechanically did as she was desired ; and the appearance of Celine prevented further inquiries or explanations for the present.

CHAPTER IX.

SIR CHARLES WILTON, in personal appearance, might be considered to resemble both his sisters, but far to excel either in pretensions to beauty; for, with the animation of his elder sister, he had the proportional height, grace, and regular features of the younger. Of his character some idea may be, perhaps, collected from the preceding conversation, and its further developments will appear as we proceed. As the trio seated themselves in the carriage, to repair to Belgrave Square, the first words uttered amongst them were by him.

“So you tell me this little girl is a furious Tory? Well, we must see if she is the divinity to deserve to dictate doctrines.”

“Yes; but remember, Charles, she is romantic besides—enthusiastic, indeed,—and thinks levity on serious subjects very bad taste,” said his elder sister.

“ Why, you make me fancy a Gorgon frowning and shaking its hideous head, instead of a lovely young girl of eighteen ; and were it not for your assurance of her blushing at my name, I should almost give up the undertaking in despair. However, here we are. Now, fair Rosa—

‘ Thou for my sake at *Hymen’s* shrine,
And I at any god’s for thine ! ’ ”

And so saying, he sprang into the hall ; and while waiting for his sisters to follow, glanced at a mirror, to ascertain that the short drive had not in any degree deranged his *recherché*, but seemingly simple, toilet. Satisfied with the glance, he dismissed the subject from his mind, and followed his sisters into the drawing-room, where Mr. L’Estrange and his daughter waited to receive them, as if incapable of any thought at the moment, but of the privilege thus accorded him. Nor was the seeming altogether so false as he had intended that it should be. Gentlemen do not generally place very much reliance upon ladies’ opinions of each other’s beauty, especially brothers upon those of sisters’ ; and Sir Charles Wilton, aware of the deep stake involved in his wooing and winning Miss L’Estrange, having made ample allowance in his own mind for his sister’s prepossession, and even exaggeration, in her representations of her friend, was perfectly dazzled by the beautiful, elegant-looking being

who now came forward to receive him as her guest, and the brother of her friends, with a blush certainly, but such a blush as the veriest coxcomb that ever existed could not have mistaken for anything more than the natural bashfulness of a young girl assuming a position so new to her.

Nothing could have possibly tended so much to Sir Charles Wilton's advantage as this surprise. Perfectly subdued by "the might, the majesty of loveliness," his manner and conversation lost, at once, the tone and air of self-conceit and arrogance which too frequently rendered them unpleasing; and he appeared the graceful and cultivated gentleman which the circumstances of his education and life, hitherto, were calculated to form. Delighted at being able, once more, to exercise his hospitable feelings, Mr. L'Estrange had added two gentlemen to the little party; and though one was of Tory, and the other of Whig principles, and once or twice there seemed an approach to a sharp encounter of wits between them, Sir Charles Wilton, without the slightest apparent effort, contrived to prevent collision; and while, rather seeming to betray, than to profess that he was himself an ultra Tory, appeared to smooth away all unpleasantness, more by the suavity of his manner and the grace of good breeding than by any compromise of his principles.

Miss L'Estrange became, like himself, most

agreeably surprised. For, like him, too, she had made considerable allowance for the probable partiality of his sisters ; and now she almost dreaded the examination as to her impressions which she believed awaited her on her return to the drawing-room. In this, however, she was mistaken ; Miss Wilton was perfectly satisfied upon the subject.

Although Miss L'Estrange had not taken any part whatever in the conversation while it touched on politics, Miss Wilton had been a close observer ; and could perceive the colour rising, more than once, to her cheek, and the flash of intelligence kindling in her innocent eyes, as she turned them from one speaker to the other, and finally suffered them to rest, with an intense, but unconscious expression of approbation upon Sir Charles. This, for the present, was all, and more than all, his sister could have hoped ; and while it tended to raise even her opinion of her brother's talents, just so much did those of the credulous girl fall in her worldly estimation ; and before they left the dining-room she had come to the conclusion that little more remained to be done, now, than to let matters take their course, by keeping all trifling obstacles out of their way. One difficulty, indeed, might have damped a less determined character—the state of Sir Charles's finances ; but although, in her anxiety to get to England, Miss Wilton had

preached more than she herself believed of the willingness of monied men to exchange wealth for rank in disposing of their daughters, and had even hinted at the fair girl's own inclinations that way, the slight insight she had, already, obtained into Mr. L'Estrange's character convinced her that he would not be found averse to make good her words, and that that which she had herself looked on as little more than a bait was likely to turn out a substantial, and most desirable reality. With such impressions on all sides, it is not to be wondered at if the evening passed delightfully away.

The gentlemen followed the ladies almost immediately to the drawing-room; but Sir Charles Wilton stood aloof from Miss L'Estrange, making it perfectly, though unobtrusively, evident, however, as he did so, that it was in grateful consciousness of her having been his companion at dinner, and gentlemanly consideration for her, as well as for those who had not enjoyed that happiness. Nor did a motive or a sentiment he wished to convey fall to the ground, between the accomplished man of the world, and the sensitive, ingenuous girl, whose perceptions and sympathies were all in their first delicious freshness and purity; when the attentions, which man is proud to be permitted to pay to beauty, are received as kindness, and admiration mistaken for affection. Oh! what after-consciousness of

right, what arrogance of power, can ever replace the loss of those gentle, it may be, humble, but most exquisite delusions !

The moment that the carriages were announced, however, Sir Charles Wilton was again at Miss L'Estrange's side ; and although, in offering his arm, he uttered not a word, his smile expressed as plainly as words could do, " My *right* befriends me once more, and to be generous I cannot afford." Miss L'Estrange blushed as she read the smile, and was glad he happened not to be at her left side, that he might not feel a little bound of the young heart.

Although not highly organized by nature for a musician, Sir Charles Wilton, finding that the want of such organization was considered, on the Continent, like any other physical deficiency, cultivated the little taste, of which, perhaps, none are wholly divested, with so much perseverance and assiduity, that, if still not enjoying music as a passion, it served him as a pretence ; and, as he now led Miss L'Estrange through the crowded lobby of the Opera House, he softly whispered, " I hope I may be able to stay near you. This, I think you said, is your first opera,—it will be a great pleasure to me if I may keep my place ; and, presumptuous as it may sound, I might not be an ineligible receptacle for your sensations—knowing, as I do, every idea Rossini means to convey, as I did the familiar

sounds of my lullaby, though not exactly with the same effect, while the face of every singer is to me as familiar as that of an old friend."

"Oh, I hope you will, then, remain beside me! How fortunate for me that you arrived to-day!" Miss L'Estrange hastily exclaimed, wholly carried away by the prospect of the enchanting enjoyment that awaited her.

Sir Charles Wilton uttered not a word in reply. He did not even look at her; but she thought—she fancied—she feared—but oh! how ardently she hoped not—that her hand was pressed a little more closely to his arm; but if it was so, doubtless it was owing to the crowd, and the alarm was soon forgotten in listening to the miraculous powers of poor Malibran, at that time holding the world in rapturous amazement.

And Sir Charles Wilton did keep his place at Miss L'Estrange's shoulder! and it *was* to him she turned her glowing face when her emotion became too powerful for words, for he performed well and gracefully the grateful task of explaining to her, and arranging for her her own feelings and ideas.

It was a delightful evening! It was delightful to all parties; for while Miss Wilton was perfectly content to chatter and dispute, now with Mr. Russel, the Whig, and now with Mr. Home, the Tory, Susan had ample opportunity to bestow

her languid attentions on Mr. L'Estrange; who, although he thought, if he had had his choice, he should have preferred the more lively lady, was just at that age when men begin to make up their minds to be satisfied with any woman who will take the trouble of encouraging them; while Sir Charles Wilton, pleased with himself for pleasing, where, he now believed, that all would wish to please, perhaps never looked, and never felt, so amiably. Nor were his sisters forgotten in his bland good-humour; several times he turned to them, several times he addressed each with little allusions to foreign reminiscences, or with an observation upon some particular passage of the music, which he generally afterwards explained to Miss L'Estrange; and, if his younger sister did not meet him with the animated welcome of the elder, it might be attributed to their different characters, and Miss L'Estrange almost sighed at the sight of such delightful companionship in a family, as she recollected her own solitary home. Once, indeed, as she turned quickly round, she caught a look darted by Miss Wilton to her brother, which disconcerted, and made her turn her blushing face still more hastily away; and had Sir Charles addressed her at that moment, a chill might have fallen upon their intercourse not easily to be removed; but he had far too much tact for that; he, too, had caught the

look, and seen its effect; and, with difficulty restraining himself from inflicting personal chastisement on his sister for the accident, he hung back from Miss L'Estrange's chair, silent, and apparently confounded; until she, in her gentleness, recollecting that it was one of Frances's old, incorrigible niaiseries, for which it would not be honourable to punish him, addressed him once more herself. Still he continued silent and subdued; and, by the humble and expressive penitence of his manner, contrived not only to invest the trifling circumstance with salutary importance, but to convert it into an opportunity for manifesting his own delicacy and humility. And once again she turned hastily towards him—and once again she caught an expressive, smiling look; but this time it was from himself, and exchanged with some person in the pit.

“You have discovered an acquaintance,” she said, innocently following the direction of his eyes with her own; but hastily did she turn, not only them, but her whole face away again, as she perceived many directed towards herself. “What are they all staring at?” she asked, with the most perfect simplicity, of Sir Charles, towards whom she had turned for refuge; for, although vague ideas of her own beauty had, as we have seen, been presented to her mind more than once, she was yet far from being prepared for its practical effects.

Sir Charles Wilton seemed really at a loss how to answer her. But as, on glancing round again, she perceived the eyes even more determinedly bent towards her, and repeated her question with some uneasiness, he said gently, and in a low, deprecatory tone, "If Miss L'Estrange will look round the boxes, as those gentlemen, without doubt, have done, and then think of the reflection of her own mirror, she will scarcely continue to wonder that eyes which have found such a resting-place should not wish to wander." She understood him at once; and, above all pretence, while the colour still deepened in her cheek, she exclaimed, "Do you really mean to tell me that is the cause? What rudeness! Papa, will you change places with me?" And it was only on her companions all joining in laughing at her prudery, when Sir Charles, in self-defence, explained the cause of the request, and in pointing out to her what a coquettish appearance it would wear, that she desisted; but when she did so, innate dignity, overcoming natural bashfulness, prompted her to resume her first position at once; and neither by word nor look did she again betray that she was conscious of the continuance of the gaze of admiration.

In the meantime, Sir Charles Wilton made his own comments on the whole proceeding. "She is a child in knowledge of the world," he said

to himself, "but by no means in character, I see. I must take care that Frances does not confound the appearances, and bungle. To strike, and not to convince, is our game with one of her stamp; and that, too, before she becomes accustomed to admiring eyes."

CHAPTER X.

“Do you know, Rosa, those are most delightful friends of yours,” said Mr. L’Estrange, as he and his daughter sat at breakfast the morning after the opera. “How did it come that you never mentioned them to me before?”

“Dear papa, I did; but you did not seem to mind me.”

“Oh, you may have mentioned the girls among your schoolfellows, but—” and he paused; for he had just enough of perception of her character to be aware that to hint to her his hopes, about Sir Charles, would not tend much to realize them; but being unused to manœuvre, he did it awkwardly, and was afraid to mention his name at all. This consciousness, which his daughter instantly perceived, threw a restraint over her also. “Do you know what I have been thinking of, Rosa?” he re-

sumed, after a short silence,—“that, as I find more to do than I expected at the bank, and might not get to Cheltenham quite so soon as I hoped, it would be very pleasant if the Miss Wiltons would come and stay here with you until we are able to move; and it might suit them also, for they have no plans of any kind formed, I understand; and it must be very stupid for them at an hotel, besides so very expensive; for they frankly acknowledged that they are very poor; their father left his only son all he could—which tells well for him, in every way;” and although Mr. L’Estrange thought he had managed most adroitly to throw in a good word, apparently so undesignedly, both he and his daughter blushed when he said it.

She then perceived that there was an unnatural, an unfounded, sort of phantom consciousness springing up between them, that would, if allowed, become most embarrassing; and, determining to make an effort to quell it at once, she rose, and getting behind her father’s chair, threw her arms round his neck and whispered—“Papa, you do not want to get rid of me already?”

Mr. L’Estrange started from his chair, as if detected in some hideous crime. “Get rid of you, love!” he said, folding her in his arms; “no, so help me Heaven! as I looked forward to your coming to be mistress of my house as almost the happiest event of my life. But you will tire of

keeping house for me, love, and it is very natural that you should; and—somehow or other—but now that we *have* opened our minds to each other, as we ought, and as I was longing to do, only for fear of vexing you, what do you think of Sir Charles Wilton? Is he not a fine fellow?"

"A very nice, gentlemanly person, indeed, I think, he appears to be," she answered at once.

"Well, come, so far so good. I see he's dying in love with you already; and although he spoke openly and frankly—I do like that open dealing—of some debts on his property, which he intends to pay off immediately, I should be very sorry to let a few thousands, more or less, stand in the way of your happiness."

"My dear papa!" his daughter now exclaimed, in a tone of unfeigned surprise at this jump to a conclusion.

"No, no; I know it's all too soon to think of that," he said, hastily; "I merely mean to let you know my sentiments; but now, once more, what do you think of my proposal about the girls coming here?"

"That it is most kind and considerate, dear papa; but I rather fear that the acknowledgment of poverty which you speak of—the possibility of its being an object to them, in short, may be an objection on their part, and render it almost an indelicate proposal upon ours."

On this head, however, Miss L'Estrange was soon relieved. When next she saw Miss Wilton alone, she approached the subject with as much delicacy and diffidence as ever man did proposals to his mistress; but before she had ventured either to hope or fear that she had made herself understood, Miss Wilton rapturously embraced her.

"My dearest, dearest Rosa! say not a word more," she exclaimed. "Cold and unmeaning ceremony has, you know, been long excluded from our councils; and I, therefore, instead of making any petty difficulties for the purpose of having them overcome, frankly declare to you that nothing on earth could be more delightful to me; and, moreover, I venture to declare the same in the names of Charles and Susan. So only speak out, now, as frankly as I have done. When shall we unite?—to-day at dinner?—or to-morrow?—or next day?—or when?—

"“ Speak your wishes, speak your will!
Swift obedience meets them still!”

"Do you remember how you used to love that story, Rosa—'Beauty and the Beast,' was it not? I suppose you traced your prototype in the beauty; but I trust your husband will not have to go through such an ordeal to win your fair hand!—but eh!—what's the matter, dearest creature? Is it possible that, after all, my frankness has outrun

my discretion? Perhaps I took your invitation in too extended a sense,—perhaps you only meant to *feed*, and not to *lodge* us?—perhaps so many beds in a town house?—though, no; for I saw as many elegantly appointed through the house; and Susan and I are quite accustomed to sleep together. Travelling on the Continent quite cures fastidiousness on that point. However, if such is the cause of your gentle confusion, I am only rendering confusion worse confounded. So, once more, speak, dearest—shall we keep on our rooms at the Clarendon, and come to you to dinner?”

“Oh, no!” Miss L’Estrange said, hurriedly; “we certainly meant you to come to-day, and stay altogether, and to give up your rooms; but I think—I fear—I mean—I know—papa only meant”—and again she stopped, in the most painful embarrassment.

Miss Wilton laughed, or affected to laugh, *à gorge déployée*. “Only meant for a few days,” she said, finishing the sentence. “You dear little simpleton! how could you suppose I understood or expected anything else?—of course not; it is only too kind as it is; so if this is the cause of your blushing and confusion,—which, after all, I envy you more than anything else, it makes you look so young and innocent,—you may recover yourself now, for we understand each other perfectly, as I flatter myself we always shall.” And absolutely

stifling whatever further attempt Miss L'Estrange had courage to make, in another enthusiastic embrace, she tripped out of the room and out of the house.

Miss L'Estrange remained behind, in a state of confusion such as she had not only never felt, but never even imagined herself capable of feeling before. She was standing in the middle of the room when her friend's arms had last encircled her, and, as if unable to move from the spot, she stood there still, feeling the conscious glow spread upwards from her beating heart, until neck, brow, hands, and arms tingled beneath its influence. At this moment she heard her father's step approaching. He was not, perhaps, exactly the confidant she would have chosen at such a moment; but no other offered, and her sensations were too painful for restraint. Accordingly, the moment he appeared, without moving from the spot, or the position in which she stood, she coolly said—

“ Papa, I am lost—disgraced; and have involved you in the consequences!” and proceeded to inform him of her having suffered Miss Wilton to depart under the impression that Sir Charles was included in the invitation, defending herself, at the same time, so far as to declare she did not yet know how the mistake had occurred, nor what had prevented her from rectifying it; and concluded by asking if anything could yet be done.

Mr. L'Estrange burst into an obstreperous fit of laughing; not like Miss Wilton, but from his very heart of hearts. "And is this all?" he exclaimed. "I dare say you did it on purpose, sly boots! Nay, Rosa; such a look to poor père! Well, seriously, I see nothing that can be done to rectify your blunder, but to endeavour to make the house as agreeable as you can to him. And pray remember that will be no sinecure to a man who has seen so much of the world. And let me tell you, if he accepts the invitation, it will be a capital sign; for few young men would choose to exchange the freedom of an inn—isn't that some line in poetry?—for the restraints of a private house!"

Sir Charles Wilton, however, stood the test. He and his sisters came; and in one fortnight from that time he was the affianced husband of Rosa L'Estrange.

It is impossible that any god-mother with fairy wand could have smoothed the path for the designs of the Wiltons more completely than the combination of circumstances, with their own adroitness in seizing them, had done so far. Mr. L'Estrange's heedless temper, and Rosa's innocent, confiding heart, with her utter ignorance of life, had given ready credence to all that had been presented to them for belief; and the Wiltons were just then in a situation to present nothing but what was desirable. Sir Charles had, almost immediately after

his return to England, been paid three thousand pounds; which being the result of a gambling transaction of at least doubtful character, he had never ventured to count upon very confidently, although receiving the interest of it for some years; and it was in lodging this sum in Mr. L'Estrange's bank that he took occasion to hint to him about the debts on his property, and his own determination to pay them off, with the view of accustoming his mind in time to that which must, he hoped, come to his knowledge at last; and this "god-send," as he termed it,—which he carefully concealed from his sisters' knowledge,—while it tended to deceive Mr. L'Estrange both as to his character and resources, preserved himself in a state of the most amiable and delightful spirits, and left his mind sufficiently at ease to devote its powers exclusively to the grand object he had now in view.

Miss Susan Wilton, on the other hand, continued her attentions to Mr. L'Estrange; and although in reality he did little more than endure them, still he bore them like a man; that is, he felt flattered, and flattered her doubly in return; and she believed, and was so perfectly satisfied that she became amiably amenable to every hint from brother and from sister, and never again during the whole fortnight threatened to "bless herself." Miss Wilton, in the meantime, though seeing clearly that Susan's blandishments would never

turn to more advantage than keeping Mr. L'Estrange in play, fooled her to the top of her bent to keep her in this desirable mood ; and, for the sake of the incalculable advantages to them all—of Sir Charles's marriage with Rosa—was content to add a few weeks more to the two years she had herself already endured of deep, hidden, but never-slumbering anxiety and suspense.

Sir Charles Wilton, in pursuance of his own opinion of its being safer for him to attempt to strike—i. e., to deceive—than to convince, had not hitherto ventured to lose sight of his prey for one single day, even for the purpose of visiting his property ; his long absence from which, together with having only so recently come into possession, had served to account for the vague answers with which he had met any approach to investigation on the part of Mr. L'Estrange. This, however, he knew could not last ; and therefore, as he now felt as secure as he could be until the knot was tied for better or worse, he announced, with all proper lover-like despair, the necessity of his absence for some days ; and consigning his beloved to the tender attentions of his sisters, he took his departure accordingly.

“ How *shall* we get on without Charles ? ” said Miss Wilton, as Miss L'Estrange was going towards the piano after dinner, the first day of his absence.

“ Tolerably, I hope,” she answered, smiling.

“You see, I am going to try what I can do to beguile the time.”

“By singing some despairing ditty, I suppose?”

“No, indeed,” she answered, now quite laughing. “I was going to try to catch up a most funny, spirited jig I heard a little boy whistling in the street, just before dinner, and which has been haunting me ever since.”

Miss Wilton stared at her.

“Charles would be flattered if he heard what has usurped the place of his image,” she said.

“Why, he does not wish me to be unhappy, does he? But do listen to this jig, it really is delicious—I’m afraid it must be Irish.”

Miss L’Estrange was still happy in her own exquisite organization, both physical and mental. The devotion of a handsome, fashionable young man, the brother of her dearest friends, approved by her father, and of political and religious principles that threw even her own into the shade, had not yet tended to make her less so; but it was because she had hitherto mistaken the loose, floating balance of animal spirits for the capital; and, still unconscious of the depths of her own sensibilities, knew not how precious was the stake involved.

CHAPTER XI.

HOWEVER philosophically Miss L'Estrange might endure the absence of her lover, there was one of the party on whom either that or some other contemporaneous cause seemed to produce an effect, not only depressing, but gloomy and portentous. Mr. L'Estrange, from having been the gayest and apparently most disengaged amongst them all, suddenly became thoughtful, reserved, and even capitious; so that the tender Susan herself was obliged to watch her time for flattering him, and spent the rest in alternately pouting with anger, and hoping that these moods were only the effects of his final struggles for the liberty he had so long enjoyed.

It might have been about three days after Sir Charles's departure, and when the young ladies were endeavouring to recover from the influence

of an unusually silent morning's meeting, by discussing their own plans for the day, that Miss L'Estrange was once more summoned from the room by a mysterious whisper; and on going down to the dining-room, where she was informed her father waited to speak with her, she was surprised, and a little startled, to find him pacing up and down the room with hasty and impatient strides; while the heightened colour in his face, and the veins somewhat swollen in his forehead, evinced a degree of agitation which he vainly endeavoured to subdue. The moment his daughter appeared, he accosted her with, "Here, Rosa!—here's some money for your wedding clothes,—ha! ha! ha!—that is," with a sort of wild, bitter smile, "if you ever happen to require them. No, no,—I beg your pardon—upon my honour—upon my soul, I did but jest. I have not heard one single word of or from Sir Charles since he left us. No; it was quite another thing I alluded to—merely the caprice of ladies. Here! I told you the other day to get everything you wanted on credit; but I have changed my mind, and think that a bad way of going on,—ha! ha! ha! Rosa, did you ever hear the saying, 'when the steed is stolen, you may shut the stable door,' eh? However, as I was saying, here is money enough to buy you a tolerable trousseau; and, mark me now, as I particularly wish that none of the servants, nor even any of

yourselves, should go into the town to-day, or see any one you can avoid, I will send some of the various tradespeople to you with goods; and be sure you buy from them all, and pay ready money for everything; and anything you don't want yourself, I dare say you can prevail upon your friends to accept; they don't appear to be as fastidious in that way as you imagined. And now, God bless you, my dear child! I must be off; I have not a single moment to lose. I hope I have made myself clear, and that you will follow up my ideas. Don't be sending any of the people into the city; and don't admit visitors for this one day; and, above all things, don't give a hint to your friends that anything is wrong,—in fact, there is not; but I mean of anything I have said,—but make any excuse you think best for not going out to-day. By-the-bye, perhaps the best way would be for me to take our own horses,—yes," he cried, ringing the bell, violently; "I wonder I did not think of that before. Here, William, order the chariot and four horses instantly to the door, without a moment's delay; and—or, stay; order them to be put to immediately, and I shall go to the stable-yard myself, and get in there. Yes, that will be best."

"But where are you going, my dear papa?" his daughter asked; and they were the first words she got time or breath to utter.

"Going? Oh, I am obliged to go out of town

for a few hours on business. If I am not home before ten o'clock, don't expect me to-night. Good-bye again," and he flung his pocket-book on the table, and rushed out of the house.

New as Miss L'Estrange was in the world, it was impossible she could have witnessed the agitation and incoherence exhibited by her father without positive, though vague and indefinite, alarm. When re-assured on the subject of Sir Charles's having met with any accident, which naturally first occurred to her, or of his having "proved untrue," which perhaps, unnaturally, secondly occurred to her, her old phantom—fear of poverty—of course presented itself. But, to her unpractised and upright mind, the whole tenour of her father's speech, the whole purport of his visit, seemed to contradict this; and when she examined the contents of the pocket-book, she saw, or thought she saw, that it would have been madness to entertain the idea a moment longer; and being unable to supply its place with any other, she sighed, and returned to her friends, determined to use her best endeavours to conceal that anything had occurred to alarm her.

How far she might have succeeded, if thrown entirely upon her own resources, may, from her ingenuous character, be doubted; but as Mr. L'Estrange, in all his apparent haste, did not forget to send such artificers and other tradespeople as he

thought most suitable to the object he had in view, the attention of the three young ladies was soon wholly engrossed in the occupation thus provided for it ; while, between the pleasure of bestowing on one hand, and of receiving on the other, the day passed over so agreeably that, when at last the dressing-bell summoned them to separate, a conscious smile of pleasure and surprise passed over every face. Eager to examine the presents they had received, more critically than civility permitted in the presence of the giver, the sisters gladly obeyed its summons ; while Miss L'Estrange, whose understanding was still mystified, however her generous feelings might be gratified, by the events of the day, lingered for a moment to make one more attempt at their solution. Before she had made the slightest progress towards it, however, her attention was arrested by a double knock at the hall door, followed by sounds, which came pealing to her ear with startling familiarity,—

“ 'Twas *her* own voice ; she could not err ;”

and once again she felt that she was within the sphere of Mrs. Kelly's influence. On any similar occasion, Miss L'Estrange would have trusted to the servant to obey the directions he had received to exclude visitors ; but such was her prepossession of this lady's at least partial insanity, and her own

consequent nervous terror, that her first impulse was to rise and fly to the security of her own chamber. She soon had reason, however, to repent of her precipitancy. The moment she appeared upon the stairs, Mrs. Kelly, who had advanced into the hall, espied her, and turning at once from the servant whom she had been questioning, and hastening towards her with all the appearance of eager anxiety, or, as Miss L'Estrange believed, of high excitement, called out—

“ Oh, my dear Miss L'Estrange, how are you ? Tell me thruly, my dear child, how you are ; or whether I can be of any use to you or not ? You know what I mane ;—and just bid me freely go or stay, as you plase, and I'll do it without more ado.”

Miss L'Estrange, whom this address of course arrested in her flight, stood for a moment suspended between anxiety to escape and unwillingness to be guilty of absolute incivility. But while she hesitated, Mrs. Kelly eagerly advanced ; and, as each heavy foot-fall on the stairs brought her near, and more near, her victim remained, as if terror-smitten, on the spot. Arrived close to her at last, Mrs. Kelly seized her hand, and once more tucking it under her arm, said, with a sort of hysteric giggle—

“ No fear of bruisin' you on these fine wide

stairs !" and drew her back, pale and panting, towards the drawing-room.

No sooner, however, did Mrs. Kelly find herself within the door than, stopping short and glancing round, evidently more in astonishment than admiration, on the magnificence of the apartment, she finally fixed her eyes on a splendid mirror which reflected herself and her shrinking companion, and shaking her head with a slow and portentous movement, she exclaimed—

"Ay, ay ; there it is, there it is ! I see now the whole secret—the murder's out at last !"

Miss L'Estrange, no longer able to restrain herself, uttered a faint shriek, and attempted to draw away her hand ; but Mrs. Kelly grasped it firmly.

"Never heed, never heed, my dear child," she said, turning to her ; "it's no fault of yours, and I heartily grieve that you should suffer for it. But you're shaking, my poor lamb, and no wonder. Come and sit down, and let me spake a few words to you," and she drew her towards a sofa, and placing her on it, took her seat beside her. As in this process Mrs. Kelly was obliged to let go the imprisoned hand, Miss L'Estrange was just beginning once more to meditate a flight, when, as if divining her thoughts with the cunning of insanity, Mrs. Kelly hastily rose, went towards the door, and, after looking carefully on all sides, closed it with an air of mysterious caution ; and was then

again advancing to Miss L'Estrange, who had in the meantime sprang towards the bell, when the door once more opened, and a servant announced that a jeweller, who had taken away a costly bracelet presented by Miss L'Estrange to Miss Wilton, to have some trifling alteration made, was returned with the article, and waiting her commands.

Feeling this interruption to be little less than providential, Miss L'Estrange desired that he might be immediately shewn in; and hastening towards him as soon as he appeared, she determined to prolong the interview until the return of her friends. In this also, however, she was defeated.

For a few moments Mrs. Kelly stood at a short distance, apparently not bestowing more attention on them than the subject of their discussion might excuse in a person situated as she was; until Miss L'Estrange, counting out the money, and holding it towards the man, was in the act of receiving the bracelet from his hand, when, with a movement of uncontrollable energy and haste, Mrs. Kelly precipitated herself towards them, and seizing the hand of Miss L'Estrange which tendered the money in her own, she snatched the bracelet from the other, and flinging it to the man—

“Are you mad, my dear child? or what is it ails you at all?” she cried. “Here, you man! here's your necklace, or, whatever it is—take it, and go

off with yourself! Coming to the innocent child at such a moment! I dar' say you know right well what you're about; but I can tell you she's not without them that will take care of her! Take yourself off now, this very moment, for I've the money safe from you."

And the man, probably participating in Miss L'Estrange's idea respecting her insanity, was but too glad to receive it uninjured, and, regardless of the faint, gasping cry which Miss L'Estrange uttered as she saw him departing, he hurried from the house without looking behind him.

In the meantime, Mrs. Kelly felt the hand she still held grow cold and heavy in hers; and as she turned round to claim congratulations for her prowess, she found that Miss L'Estrange had fainted, and that her own tenacious grasp alone prevented her from falling to the ground. Unused to witness illness in any form, she now became immeasurably terrified; and fearing to leave the room to call for assistance, and utterly unmindful at the moment of the convenience of bells, her scared faculties suggested no better resource than to produce a current of air by fanning; and having attempted the process in vain with one or two books, and broken one or two ornamental fans that lay on a table in her nervous efforts to open them, she finally carried her victim to the sofa, and, in desperation, taking up the tail of her own gown, well

powdered with the dust of the streets, proceeded to shake it violently in her face.

At this moment, Miss Wilton entered the room, humming an opera air; and, startled to see the situation of her friend, she hastened towards her with questions and exclamations. Mrs. Kelly was too much terrified to give a lucid account of what had happened; but as she continued to envelop her in clouds of dust, she uttered, in broken sentences, "Oh! sorrow one of me knows what happened her at all, at all—unless it was the way her spirits were in before; for nothing in the wide world did I do to her but hinder her throwin' away her money on a foolish bubble of a bracerlot, or something that a gag of a man brought, smirkin' and temptin', here to her. But I'll engage I made him glad to get off with it again in a hurry. Whist! she's beginning to brathe, I think!" and she renewed her vigorous efforts.

Miss Wilton, to whom this account of the fate of her handsome bracelet was anything but acceptable, now examined Mrs. Kelly with attention, and, between the dress, appearance, and accent, felt in a moment convinced that she saw before her the prototype of Miss L'Estrange's mad woman. Her more extensive knowledge of the world had enabled her, even in Miss L'Estrange's account, to detect the difference between rusticity and insanity; but, uninterested in disabusing Miss

L'Estrange of her impression, and anxious to prevent her extending the circle of her acquaintance for a short time, she had taken no pains to correct it; and suffering now herself from this person's interference, she decided at once on acting as if she, too, were under its influence. Accordingly, turning towards her with eyes flashing with ill-repressed fury, she asked what had become of the price of the bracelet.

Poor Mrs. Kelly, too deeply interested in her own occupation to regard her tone or countenance, hurriedly replied, "It's there! it's there! all scattered about the flure, where it fell from her poor hand,—and mine, too, for that matter. But what matter about it now, or twice as much, for I'm afeard of my life she's sneezin' too often!" and then, perceiving that the poor girl made a faint movement with her hand, she suddenly stopped her fanning, and exclaimed, "Whist! who knows but what its my dust's making her sneeze!" and she proceeded towards the fireplace, and shook her clothes with an energy that drove Miss Wilton to the other side of the room. Presently returning, however, to the sofa, as she saw Miss L'Estrange begin to revive, she leant over her, and asked what had happened.

Miss L'Estrange glanced fearfully round the room, and again closing her eyes, groaned out rather than said, "*Oh, that woman!*"

“ Shall I get rid of her ? ” Miss Wilton whispered in return ; and without waiting for an answer, she went towards Mrs. Kelly, and intimated, in a manner not to be mistaken, that Miss L’Estrange wished to be left alone. Mrs. Kelly coloured violently, even through a cheek of some fifty summers, when she could believe the report of her own ears ; and after regarding Miss Wilton for a moment with eyes in which displeasure struggled with astonishment, she advanced towards Miss L’Estrange, who shrank into the very smallest dimensions possible at her approach, and in a voice of such calm dignity as would have produced a favourable impression on any less prepossessed audience, said, “ Young lady ! I have, for your sake, incurred an affront such as never was offered to me before ; for your sake, and your family’s sake, I would even put up with it yet, now that you’re in distress, if I can be of the smallest use to you, for I know my own motives too well to mind nonsense, after the first brush ; so just tell me, jewel,” she said, rapidly losing her short-lived anger in her habitual benevolence, “ if I can do you any good by staying and helping you in any way ? ” But as she, unfortunately, at the same moment, attempted to take her hand, the poor girl uttered a piercing shriek, and buried her head in the pillows of the sofa.

Mrs. Kelly required no further hint to leave the room ; but as far from divining the real cause of such

extraordinary conduct as from believing it to be affectation or impertinence, she forgot every selfish feeling in her benevolent concern, in her own solution of it, and made an eager sign to Miss Wilton to follow her out of the room, which that young lady, notwithstanding her displeasure, deemed it prudent, without hesitation, to obey.

“ I’m grieved to the very heart,” Mrs. Kelly immediately began, “ to see that dear, sweet child in such a state. When did the news reach her?—and has she been that way ever since?”

“ What news?” Miss Wilton asked now in astonishment.

“ Why, blessed Lord! is it possible you don’t know? Oh, then, weary on my busy-ness!—what brought me here at all? But how could I think she would be the last to hear it, and it all over the city? Sure, the bank’s broke!”

It is perfectly certain that had Mrs. Kelly communicated this news thus abruptly to the young lady herself, the shock would have been far less than that experienced by her to whom it was now conveyed. For at least a minute she was absolutely incapable of uttering a syllable, and could only continue to glare upon Mrs. Kelly, who was now sobbing from the effects of the agitation she had undergone. After the lapse of about that space of time, Miss Wilton laid her hand upon her arm, and, half supporting herself by it, hoarsely

whispered her to accompany her down stairs. Mrs. Kelly complied; and as they passed into the breakfast-room, Miss Wilton gave orders that Miss L'Estrange's woman should be sent to her to the drawing-room, and dinner delayed for half-an-hour.

Shut into the breakfast-room, however, with Mrs. Kelly, she had little more to hear than that already told. There had been partial alarms for some days past respecting the bank; but the danger had only seemed imminent that morning. Mr. L'Estrange had himself set off in the hope of raising a sum of money in a certain quarter to meet the run; but having failed, had just despatched an express to young Kelly, who, in the absence of Mr. Steen, acted as head-clerk, to say they need not attempt to open in the morning, and that he would return immediately to give himself up to his creditors, so that secrecy need no longer be observed. On hearing this, Mrs. Kelly had naturally concluded that his own family were already informed on the subject, and that he was probably himself arrived. But aware of the confusion and anxiety attendant upon such a calamity, she had hastened to Belgrave Square to offer her services in any way in which they could be useful.

“And now,” she said, “that you tell me the poor dear child has no notion of what's before her,

will you tell me what ails her at me? for, in spite of it all, there's something about her I love and like; and she'd be just a darling girl, I see, if she was in right hands for a while."

Miss Wilton dexterously evaded this inquiry; and descanting on the weak state of Miss L'Estrange's nerves, persuaded Mrs. Kelly it was much better to leave her in ignorance of what had happened until she could have the support of her father's presence; and with a few civil apologies, founded on the state of her own feelings, very adroitly bowed her out of the house, opening the doors for her herself, to obviate any possible communication through the servants.

CHAPTER XII.

THE dismissal of Mrs. Kelly thus happily effected, Miss Wilton returned to the breakfast-room, and, sitting down and folding her hands before her, prepared regularly to avail herself of what remained of the half hour to come to some decision as to what steps would be the most prudent for her to adopt in this most unexpected state of affairs. The events of the morning, Mr. L'Estrange's sudden absence, and the lavish expenditure up to, and even increased at, the last moment, were now fully accounted for ; and as she thought of this last circumstance, being by no means one who despised the wreck when the good ship had foundered, she determined that to leave her generous young friend in her delusion as long as possible really was the best plan for all parties ; and, therefore, subduing all appearance of anxiety, she returned to the drawing-room just as dinner was

announced, and accounted for her disappearance by the difficulty, she said, she found in getting Mrs. Kelly safely out of the house.

Notwithstanding all her efforts, however, the dinner passed over more heavily than was usual with them; and although Miss L'Estrange had perfectly recovered all bodily effects from the alarm she had received, she was not sorry to yield to the entreaties of her companions that she would retire to her room for a short time to refresh her spirits.

She was no sooner gone than Miss Wilton, retiring into a small room which the young ladies were in the habit of occupying when alone, and unable longer to maintain the severe restraint she had put upon her feelings, abruptly communicated to her sister the news she had received, adding, with assumed calmness—

“And now at last our ruin is consummated.”

Susan at first started at the intelligence; but her mind being incapable of grasping distant consequences, the prospect of Mr. L'Estrange's speedy return seemed to console her for all the rest; and on the mention of their own probable ruin as being involved, she, with her usual imperturbable simplicity, merely asked, “How?”

“*How?*” repeated her sister in contemptuous indignation. “Rather tell me how it should not be so! What upon the broad earth have we to depend on now?”

“ I have my fortune, such as it is,” she sullenly replied.

“ Idiot ! ’ muttered her sister ; and then, in a burst of exasperation, passionately added, “ Know that if it even were as easy as you think to set aside your signature, Charles has not on the face of the earth at this moment one hundred pounds he can call his own ! The estate is sunk far, far beyond its worth in debt ; and Charles could, at best, have kept up appearances only while supposed to be making himself acquainted with his own affairs after his absence.”

“ And how, then, did you ever think this match could have gone on ? ”

“ Because the father is as anxious to get his daughter off his hands as she is romantic and unworldly. And without her heart having been even in the slightest degree touched, she would have walked to the altar with the same sweet and lady-like compliance that distinguished her in every trifling rule at school. Besides, I know her so well, that I felt not the slightest fear but that, at the worst, when all was dexterously made known, she would have sooner married him than made an uproar by breaking off merely for want of fortune.”

“ But you seem to forget that Rosa has ten thousand pounds of her own that no failure of her father’s can affect. Don’t you remember his saying

so laughingly one day on some occasion? So if she is so complying as you think, all may yet go on as before."

"No! both father and daughter have sufficient rationality to see that it is more prudent for a very rich man or woman, than for one only moderately rich, to marry a poor one; and besides, even if they were willing, Charles would not be so mad. No! it is over with us for ever. It would be better for the ruined baronet to shoot himself at once than marry the bankrupt's daughter."

"Athen, who knows but *an earl's daughter* might shute him better?" were the words that resounded in response through the room, in accents which, "heard, could be never forgot;" and while both sisters started from their chairs in unfeigned alarm, Mrs. Kelly made her way from the twilight of the outer drawing-room, and stood before them. Even Miss Wilton now felt for a moment disposed to think that Miss L'Estrange's opinion was the right one respecting the lady's sanity; but, dismissing this idea, as she looked upon her intelligent, animated countenance, and recollected their recent conversation, every other feeling gave way to alarm at having thus unwarily betrayed the important secrets of their family; and, absolutely confounded she stood irresolute what to say or do, until Mrs. Kelly asked to see Miss L'Estrange. Blessing her stars, then, that Miss L'Estrange had been per-

suaded to retire, she recovered herself in a moment ; and, seeing at once her only chance of safety was in establishing the impression of Mrs. Kelly's insanity, she haughtily informed her that Miss L'Estrange, seriously indisposed by the lady's former visit, had retired for the night, and could by no means be disturbed, insolently adding, that she congratulated herself on her friend's escape from an intrusion so sudden, ill-timed, and unexpected, upon their confidential intercourse.

Mrs. Kelly's countenance first expressed only unfeigned astonishment at the change in Miss Wilton's manner from that which she had exhibited at their parting ; but as she proceeded in her speech, keen indignation and contempt mingled with it ; and as soon as she ceased speaking, Mrs. Kelly exclaimed—

“ And so them is your manners, and them is your notions of propriety ? implyin' that I crep in to listen to your talk, you poor, mane-spirited crachur ! and what good do you think your foolish talk would do me, or any rational being ? or if I wanted to hear it, why didn't I keep quiet where I was ? and where was I to go, naturally, but into the room I was in in the mornin' when I hindered the man takin' the trouble to come up with me when I knew the way ? And, instead of creepin' in to hear you, if you hadn't been so busy with your own bad-hearted plans, you might have hard me

smashin' my shins as I groped my way through, to the sound of your voices."

"But what does she mean by an earl's daughter?" asked Miss Susan Wilton, who, believing herself more independent of the general fate of her family, was less confounded by its danger.

"Ay; it's time for you to ask," Mrs. Kelly immediately answered; "but I would wish to tell my manin' to herself; for as I was the one to bring her the ill news, it's fit I should be the one to bring her the good news too."

"It is quite impossible you can see her to-night," Miss Wilton peremptorily repeated; "but as she has made me promise to visit her again, if you really have any news that would give her pleasure, you had better either write it, or communicate it to me."

"Why, then, you may tell her, with my compliments and best respects, that, instead of a bankrupt's daughter this evening, she's the daughter of the Earl of Lisbrian! and you may add, if you please, that if she never knew her own worth before, she ought to learn it now."

Notwithstanding the strange manner of this communication, it did not require half Miss Wilton's penetration to see that it bore the stamp of truth, however improbable; and now, for the first time sitting down, and motioning to Mrs. Kelly to do

so, too, she felt scarcely less confounded than by the intelligence of the failure of the bank.

Mrs. Kelly utterly unused to, and as much above, all petty arts of teasing, at once proceeded to give the particulars of the event she had announced, and which had arrived by express from the Irish agent to her son since her last visit to Belgrave Square. They were concise, but tragical. The only child of the late Earl of Lisbrian, a promising boy of ten or twelve years of age, had gone out to shoot; and the old gun he carried having burst in his hand, killed him on the spot. His father, who generally sauntered after him as far as his shattered health allowed, was the first to hear the fearful sound; and on hastening forwards, found his sole object on earth a mangled corpse at his feet. The shock was too much for a feeble frame, and father and son were laid in the same grave.

Although Mrs. Kelly's eyes bore witness to the ample tribute she had already paid to the fate of her old friend and patron, she could not go over the recital without a fresh burst of genuine sorrow; and, wringing her hands! as the tears poured in floods over her face, "Och, hone! and och, hone!" she cried; "but they say thrue that tell us it's a quare world; and surely, surely, 'what's one man's mate is another man's poison;' for if this hadn't happened just in the nick of time, what would

have become of these people and their bank to-morrow?"

"And you think this event will set all right?" inquired Miss Wilton.

"To be sure it will. My son's off this hour, about everywhere, spreadin' the news; and who'd be fool to smash the bank for fun one day, and the Lisbrian estates there to back it the next."

"Do you think, then, ma'am, that we shall see Lord Lisbrian to-night?" inquired Miss Susan Wilton.

"*Aouh!*" shrieked Mrs. Kelly; but then recollecting herself, and apologizing, "God help my poor head!" she exclaimed; "But, accustomed only to hear the one person called Lord Lisbrian, faith, you started me; but I know now who you mane; and to be sure it's all right to give the gentleman his title, and what use in delayin' it? Do I think he'll be here to-night?—indeed, I cannot tell; but as its gettin' dark, if I raally am not to see Miss L'Estrange or Lady—what is her name?"

"Rosa."

"Well, Lady Rosa as I suppose *you'd* say, already, why I'll take my lave."

But Miss Wilton was by no means now prepared to part with her thus. The important intelligence she had brought, the clearness of her communications, and the consistent kindness of her heart, when once understood, left not a hope that

the impression of her insanity could withstand one further interview, even with Miss L'Estrange, or Lady Rosa, as she has instructed us to call her; and Miss Wilton knew that, although her whole attention should be turned to prevent such an interview, her chance of succeeding was too precarious to dispense with her using every precaution to guard against its probable effects. With this view, her first attempt was to request Mrs. Kelly to have coffee, or wine and water, previous to encountering more fatigue; but this civility being declined as decisively as she could herself have done, and Mrs. Kelly continuing to advance towards the door, she forced herself, though not free from some awkward confusion, to approach her, and holding out her hand, said, "I am sure I need not apprehend that any random words which Mrs. Kelly may have overheard when entering the room unawares will ever be remembered, or repeated to our disadvantage? Perhaps you are not aware, ma'am, that my sister and I are Miss L'Estrange's oldest, and I believe I may add, dearest friends?"

"Whatever you were to *Miss L'Estrange*, I have no doubt but you will be great friends to *Lady Rosa*," was the reply. "But take my advice, and make your hay while the sun shines," she added, with as much sarcasm as her simple, kind, and very unsarcastic temper would allow of her employing; "for if there's not something in that

child that will tell her before long to know right from wrong, my name's not Mary Kelly, and that it has been these thirty-three years and upwards."

Miss Wilton coloured with indignation at this rebuke; but not deeming it expedient to express it, she contented herself with exclaiming, "You surely do not mean to question my attachment to Rosa L'Estrange?"

"I'll tell you what I do *not* question, that you love her as you do an apple-pie!"

"I really do not understand you."

"You love her, then, for what good you can get of her; but let me pass, for it will be night before I'm home."

"You promise, at least, not to interfere as a mischief-maker between me and my friend?" Miss Wilton still pleaded.

"I make no promise so much beneath me. If I thought it necessary, I should most surely put her on her guard against you; but I suppose Mr. L'Estrange is not such a fool as not to look before he leaps; and it's not my character to make mischief for mischief's sake. Besides, for your comfort, I'm setting out for Ireland to-morrow."

This was indeed the most acceptable assurance of safety Miss Wilton could receive, and she therefore suffered her, without further opposition, to depart.

She was scarcely out of the house when Miss

L'Estrange, little aware of the news that awaited her, made her appearance ; and while Miss Wilton was hesitating whether, or in what manner, to make it known to her, the sudden and hasty drawing up of a carriage at the hall door, followed by a loud and authoritative knock, announced the return of Lord Lisbrian, and every voice was suspended in expectation of his appearance.

In an instant he was in the room : and, clasping his daughter in his arms, and kissing her forehead in rapturous excitement, he exclaimed, " God for ever bless my dear beautiful girl, fit in every way to adorn the highest rank she may be called on to fill ! Oh ! Miss Wiltons ! I beg ten thousand pardons ! but if you have heard the news, you will, I know, excuse me ! Have you, Rosa ? "

" No, Papa," she answered, in great astonishment, and uncertain whether she was to be called upon for fortitude or congratulation.

" No ! " he repeated ; " is it possible ? then I have the honour to introduce to you, ladies," he said, turning again to the Miss Wiltons, " my daughter as the Lady Rosa L'Estrange ; and myself as the Earl of Lisbrian, though not the less your most obedient servant ! " And though the accompanying bow was, certainly, at least, as playful as serious, Miss Susan Wilton endeavoured to blush, and succeeded in casting her eyes upon the ground.

Miss L'Estrange herself, in the meantime, began

to fear her father's senses were disordered, and looked to see if her friends did not participate in her alarm.

“What are you staring at, you little goose?” he rapidly exclaimed. “Did you not know that I was heir presumptive to my poor uncle? And, though he did make that preposterous marriage, I am really sorry for the sort of end he and his poor boy have met with; still, it was the only thing on earth could have saved us, for, of course, you know the bank was all but gone? The blockheads! to make such an infernal run without rhyme or reason! but just as that Steen had contrived to throw everything into disorder! I promise him he shall hear of it when he returns! In the meantime I must be off again, this moment, to different parts of the town; there's a world of business yet to transact to-night. That young Kelly is worth his weight in gold. However, I've no time to discuss that, or anything else, just now. I called in for some papers which I locked up to-day. Is there a candle anywhere in the room?” and, snatching up a taper and lighting it, he rushed out of the room; and they presently heard the hall-door close behind him.

It was well for Miss L'Estrange, or, as we shall in future call her, Lady Rosa, that the Miss Wiltons happened to be better informed than herself upon the all-important subjects thus hastily thrust upon her; and, when they afforded her all

the information they had themselves received, her generous heart, for a considerable time experienced no feelings but those of pity and horror for the untimely fate of the nearest relative she had on earth, after her father and brothers. The danger of the bank coming to her knowledge only as a sort of delusive alarm, afforded to her no sufficient counterbalance of so fearful a visitation; and as much shocked as concerned, she sat for several minutes weeping in a sort of nervous agony. From this state she was first recalled by Miss Wilton's pronouncing the words "poor Charles!" with a profound sigh.

"What of Sir Charles Wilton?" she inquired, with a look of anxiety that seemed to anticipate ill news of every one.

"Nay, I am only thinking of the effect this change in your situation may produce in his."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, why there is no concealing from ourselves," Miss Wilton answered, mournfully, "that, however the same to us, Miss L'Estrange and Lady Rosa may value themselves differently!"

An observation better calculated to effect her object could not have been devised by the most subtle studier of the human character. The colour which had for the last half hour forsaken the cheeks of Lady Rosa rushed back to them, as if impatient at having been excluded from its sweet abode; and,

with a look and tone such as she had never before assumed, she said, "I should be mortified indeed to find myself so lowly estimated by my friends as that a casual accession of rank could alter my position with them; and we do not often, I believe, think more humbly of ourselves." And if Sir Charles Wilton could have peeped into her proud, romantic heart at that moment, he would have felt that another rivet was struck into the chain that bound them to each other.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR a few days after the events recorded in the preceding chapter, Lord Lisbrian was frightened into an attention to the arrangement of his affairs, which scarcely left him a moment or a thought beyond what were absolutely necessary for food and rest. The return of Mr. Steen, however, by relieving him from a position as irksome as it was uncongenial to him, not only procured that gentleman's pardon for what, even to Lord Lisbrian's careless eyes and unsuspicious temper, appeared scandalous neglect, but caused him to be reinstated in his former confidential situation without the form of investigation; and Lord Lisbrian almost immediately resumed his usual routine of social, joyous, idle habits. Yet, although he spoke of the imperative necessity for his going to Ireland

immediately to look after his inheritance there, every one acquainted with him believed that his visit would be much less as a man of business than as a child impatient to examine a new toy.

“Rosa,” he said, addressing his daughter, the first time they happened to find themselves alone, “What about this business of Sir Charles Wilton’s now?”

“What business, papa?”

“Why, this proposal of his to you?”

“Do you mean our engagement, papa?”

“Why, yes, if you choose to consider it so still ; but you are aware that you have a right to look much higher now as an earl’s daughter, than you had as a mere banker’s daughter. We must see and have you properly presented at court.”

Again Lady Rosa coloured deeply, with the same feelings she had experienced when Miss Wilton suggested the same idea ; but the mortification was no longer new to her, so she framed her answer somewhat differently.

“I trust, my dear papa, you do not think me capable of being influenced by the accession of a title to any change of sentiments in so important an affair as that to which you allude?”

“Oh, no ; not of sentiments and all that, if you really have any particular ones ; but, somehow, I never fancied you in love with Sir Charles. Do you mean that you really are?”

“I hope so ; at least, as far as is necessary and proper.”

Lord Lisbrian laughed.

“Well, my love, I told you before I only wish for your happiness, and I say so still; however, I agree with you now, that we need not be in any violent hurry. Your mourning and all that has happened will afford a better excuse than we had before for delay, until we have time to look about us; and if you still continue of the same way of thinking, when you see something of the advantages of your new position, why, the only thing will be to get Sir Charles into Parliament. The Lisbrian interest ought to be very extensive. And, by-the-bye, Rosa, do you know I have been thinking that you and the Wiltons might as well come over to Ireland with me. What do you say? I fear I cannot get to Cheltenham this summer, what with the election and one thing or another; and it would be dull for you remaining in London, and, perhaps, rather odd in your circumstances, as I can form no idea of how long I may be detained. Besides, seriously, if we are to set up Sir Charles, your presence would be of material service; and I am certain that Frances Wilton would be a capital hand at electioneering.”

“I should have thought *you* might have found Susan more skilled in that respect,” his daughter said, playfully.

“Oh! indeed! should you so?” he answered in the same strain, “No!” he continued more seriously. “Do you know, I am half sick of her sentimental nonsense already? No, Rosa; if I give you a mamma, it shall be a nice one; and don’t be surprised if I should, since you choose to leave me alone so soon. I shall want some one to keep me company in the old Irish castle. Nay, you need not look so inquiringly, for I give you my word that I have not seen the fair lady yet; so, in the meantime, I must put up with you, if you will honour me with your company so far.”

At the first mention of visiting Ireland,—going to reside amongst Whigs and Papists,—the blood forsook the cheeks of Lady Rosa, and she remained overwhelmed with terrified astonishment. As her father proceeded, however, she had time to collect her senses; and seeing fully the force of his objections to leaving her in London, and feeling that if there really should be danger in going, she ought to share it with him, in a few moments she was able to give her consent to his proposal in a manner perfectly satisfactory to him; but, in return, she required his solemn promise that her engagement with Sir Charles Wilton should be kept a profound secret, as it was repugnant to all her principles and feelings to endeavour to procure for him what she considered a trust so important as the representation of a county’s interests by such an influence.

“Then, we shall lose your assistance in canvassing,” he said; “and I assure you, strangers as we all are there, both to men and women, you could be of essential service, if you would exert yourself.”

“On the contrary, dear papa; if I felt that they had reason to suppose I was canvassing for my own sake instead of for theirs—which, I trust I may say, no earthly advantage could tempt me to do—I should be utterly paralyzed, and that is chiefly why I request your silence; but if I go merely as their liege lady,” she said, smiling, “anxious for their welfare, and all that, you shall have the full benefit of my senatorial eloquence, and ‘true blue’ principles.”

“Yes; but you must not give offence by violence of party-spirit; for we may require the support of some moderate men.”

“My dearest papa,” she said, clasping her arms fondly and playfully about him, “do not say you ‘*must not*’ on such subjects, nor mingle the expedient with the right. There is, there can be, no medium in politics or religion; and nothing, I trust, shall ever bribe me to temporize or conceal my principles; they really are my household gods.”

Lord Lisbrian was not skilled to ask her why there was to be no medium in politics or religion, or who was to declare what was medium, or which were the extremes; so he only pinched her chin, and saying, “I expect much more from your smiles

than your principles," was leaving the room, when, hastily turning back, he said, " Well, now that this Irish excursion is fixed on, Rosa, I think the sooner we can get off the better. If Sir Charles returns in time to accompany us, well and good ; if not, he can follow us. But there is one thing I wish to mention to you, I shall not take over a single one of the servants from here. You see, that cursed run upon the bank got wind in spite of me ; and, although the rumour of this inheritance stopped it just in the nick of time, that is all the solid benefit I have derived from it yet ; and, to tell you a secret, we could not stand an hour's run this moment. I don't know how it is, for my part. Steen declares it was I and Kelly who threw everything into confusion ; but I don't know. I thought I was clear-headed enough when I could lay my mind to anything ; and it seemed to me that nothing could be worse than the state in which he left matters ; although I should never have discovered it but for that accidental run. However, he declares it's a method of his own which has always succeeded,—certainly, so far as that goes, it has ; and at all events one thing is clear, that no one else can set them to rights now ; and my best plan, he thinks, is, to hasten to Ireland, and raise as much money as I possibly can ; so you see, my love, there's not a moment to be lost. And what I was saying about

the servants is, that I don't want them to come over, blabbing about the run ; because, some idiot might take fright and set up another, before we were half prepared ; so, as Hubert has done with Oxford this term, and wrote to say he should like to visit Ireland, I intended to have gone by Oxford and taken him up, and his servant could attend us home ; and this, I think, might still be managed. We could send our own men back from thence ; and, if my poor uncle retained any of his former propensities, or, indeed I believe I may say, those of his family, we shall find an establishment ready formed when we arrive."

" But our women, papa ?" inquired his daughter ; " may we not take our women ? for I am inclined to think the Miss Wiltons would give up the expedition altogether, even if they consent to it otherwise, rather than go without Celine."

" Why, yes, by-the-bye," he answered, " probably, lady's-maids did not form any part of the old gentleman's establishment, any more than of my calculations ; however, as Celine, they say, cannot speak a word of English, she will hardly take her first lesson in talking of banking affairs ; and for Boothe, she has been so long with you, and is so faithful, that I am not afraid of her ; so now we have nothing to do but to prepare as fast as we can. You seem to have some doubts of your friends

accompanying us,—I have none; and you know I have been right hitherto.”

And he was still right; although for a long time Lady Rosa doubted it.

When her father left her, she went immediately in search of her friends; and, finding them together, she communicated to them the project of getting Sir Charles into parliament, repeating exactly what had been said on the subject, and concluding with the proposal that they should all accompany him to Ireland immediately. During this communication, Miss Wilton turned first as pale as death, and then as red as fire; and when it ceased, remained gazing upon Lady Rosa, without uttering a syllable in reply.

“Ah! I see, my dearest Frances,” Lady Rosa said, observing her emotion,—“I see that you participate in my terrors; but you have not the same motives for subduing them, therefore, do not, I beseech you, think a moment more of my selfish proposal; and, believe me, I am ashamed of having made it.” And she was hastening over to embrace her, when a sort of audible sneer from Miss Susan Wilton attracted her attention; and, turning round, the expression of the young lady’s face was such as to make her almost involuntarily exclaim, “For heaven’s sake, what is the matter?”

“Nothing, nothing!” Susan answered; “only that you mistake the nature of Frances’s emotion

I promise, for her, that she will be very happy to accompany you to *Ireland*."

"Yes," said Miss Wilton, recovering her voice, in this extremity; "Susan does me but justice, Rosa! I shall be very happy to accompany you; and, as she promised for me, so will I for her, and from precisely similar feelings." And believing she had recalled her sister to recollection by this hint, she continued, "If the strangeness, the unexpectedness of such a plan, brought up as we have been respecting Ireland, and the thoughts of Charles standing a contested election there, and having his principles canvassed in a Catholic country,—if all this did, for a moment, overcome me, I know that you, my own sweet Rosa, will not only excuse, but will sympathize in my feelings."

"I do, I do! believe me, my dear friend," Lady Rosa warmly exclaimed; "and so fully that the greatest proof you could give me of your confidence in my friendship would be to yield to feelings so natural, and think no more of my proposal." And again she was about to embrace her, when again she was startled, even more than before, by an expression in Miss Wilton's countenance so like to the sneer of her sister as to be almost fearful, the object still being evidently herself.

"What is the matter?" Lady Rosa asked once more, and once more she was answered, "Nothing! Nothing, Rosa; but that it half grieves, half

amuses me to find how little you know me ! But I do not wish to make professions now ; let it be enough to say, that I gladly—thankfully—oh, most thankfully ”—and her eyes were, as if unconsciously, cast up to heaven, with a momentary gleam of wild devotion,—“ most thankfully accept your invitation, which you no longer have the power to withdraw : ‘ whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge ! ’ And if ever Miss Wilton felt an emotion of genuine affection for the innocent, and, as it appeared, effectual instrument she had chosen for her purposes, it was at that moment, when she had so far outrun her fondest aspirations that she appeared to her as no less than her guardian angel in human form.

Lady Rosa soon after left the room, and the first use Miss Susan Wilton made of her absence was to burst into the nearest semblance to a laugh in which she ever indulged.

“ A pretty mess Charles is in now, I think ! ” she exclaimed ; “ and you, too, Frances, since you choose to sink or swim with him. What is to become of him ? ”

“ I don’t know ! ” Miss Wilton answered, in an absent, languid manner.

“ You don’t know ! why, don’t you know that all secrets come out at an election as at the day of judgment,—why, I know that much myself ! ”

“ He must brave it as he can ! ” Miss Wilton answered, still in the same manner.

“ Why, what ails you, Frances ? are you ill, or dying ? ” asked her sister.

“ No ! ” she replied, starting up with sudden and startling energy ; and seizing her sister’s arm, she exclaimed, “ Susan, the hour is come !—the die is cast ! I am half afraid to look upon it ; but if I win—O God ! if I should win *him* ? ” and, bowing her head into her hand, she seemed overwhelmed with the thought, to the verge of raving ; but, once more recovering herself, she released her sister and said more collectedly, though still in great excitement, “ Susan, the threads of destiny are thrust into our hands,—whether we can guide them or not I know not myself at this moment ; but this I do know, that it will require almost super-human dexterity and caution, if we can ; promise me, then, my dear sister,—promise me, as you hope for salvation, that you will never again endanger all as you did by that sneer to-day ? ”

This was a remonstrance so different from that which Susan had expected on this subject that, in perfect sincerity, she asked once more if her sister were ill.

“ No, no ; don’t be a fool, Susan,—only promise me that, and to be guided by my directions ? ”

“ Oh, thank you ! is that the meaning of *my dear sister* ? ”

“ Good God of heaven ! ” Miss Wilton exclaimed, in distraction. “ Susan ! ” she resumed, “ I only mean respecting Charles, and religion,

and politics, and such subjects, and—and concerning my own affairs !”

“ Oh ! if that is all, I promise you ; but how you do love that man, Frances !”

“ That’s breaking your promise !” shrieked Miss Wilton, wildly seizing her arm again, and glaring in her face ; then, as if terrified by her own excitement, and feeling the necessity of subduing it, she said with forced calmness, “ Susan, I beg your pardon ; but you must bear with me a little. I feel as if I had all your destinies in my hands,—and it is a fearful trust !”

“ But what *will* Charles do about the election ?” asked Susan again.

“ What he has done all his life,” replied his elder sister ; “ trust to circumstances, and make the best of them as they occur !” And so saying, she retired to her own apartment, to endeavour to recover from a state of agitation so unusual with her.

CHAPTER XIV.

“A LETTER from William!—and out of his turn, too,—that *is* a compliment! I suppose it must be to congratulate me upon my emancipation from school!” exclaimed Lady Rosa L’Estrange, as a letter, in the handwriting of her elder brother, bearing a foreign post-mark, was presented to her, as she and her two friends sat together in the drawing-room after dinner. Having glanced over its short and hasty contents, however, she smiled and said, “I flattered myself too far; that important event seems to have weighed no further with him than as subservient to another. He writes to announce that he is just setting out on a tour with his friend Lord Stepney—so that he cannot receive our letters, with all their important news—and to desire me to make the acquaintance of a Lady St. Clair, whom he describes as all perfect, and who,

he calculates, will have arrived at the — Hotel, from the Continent, before this letter reached me. Perhaps you may have met her in your rambles? He says she is a young and lovely widow.”

A second or two elapsed between this question and its answer; but as Lady Rosa happened to stoop for her handkerchief at the moment, she did not perceive the rush of colour to the faces of both sisters, nor the hasty, conscious glance exchanged between them; and by the time that she looked up, Miss Wilton was able to answer with tolerable composure, though still with marked emphasis, “Why, yes; I rather think we did meet with her; and, unless you have any particular fancy for a step-mother, I advise you to hold that letter to the candle, and forget that you ever received it.”

“What can you possibly mean?” exclaimed Lady Rosa. “Has papa ever met this lady?”

“If he had, my caution were too late. I merely mean that she is a person whom no man, young or old, wise or foolish, rich or poor, ever yet withstood; who sows dissension and misery wherever she appears; and is as abhorrent to women as she makes herself attractive to men!”

“Good Heavens! that is indeed a frightful picture; but if my brother has escaped her——”

“Your brother escaped her!” bitterly exclaimed Miss Susan Wilton, in her turn; “and what, if he has escaped her, makes him write you that letter?”

“ To procure me an agreeable acquaintance, I supposed,” said Lady Rosa, innocently.

“ No ; I rather suppose everything is settled for their marriage !” Miss Wilton said, coolly and decisively.

“ Why, Frances, you are talking incoherently ! One moment you tell me this lady will marry my father, whether he will or not. The next, that you are sure she is on the eve of marriage with my brother !”

“ Incoherent I grant you it appears ; nevertheless, *she* will contrive to make it clear as noonday. She comes here to ingratiate herself with you and your father, because, when she left Italy your brother was dependent on papa’s approbation, which does not suit her views by any means ; but *she* will overshoot her own mark ; for she is precisely the woman whom no man approves as a wife for any one but himself, so, in angling for the son, she will hook the papa, and have to be content therewith. Nay, Rosa, my sweet friend, never look serious at my plain speaking. What but your interest can I have at heart ? But I *should* be, I own, provoked to see you jostled aside by this accomplished actress. You know, of course, that she commenced her career on the stage ?”

“ No, I did not, indeed !”

“ Oh yes ; and, as a pretty pert barmaid, she wheedled the old doting Viscount St. Clair into

matrimony, when on the verge of the grave. He died at Nice, four or five months after, and left her his residuary legatee, which comprised his wardrobe, and what money was in his escritoire. She really suffered intensely; but mourning being cheaper on the Continent, and the market of English beauty higher than in England, she remained abroad, casting her nets about her; but, with all her undeniable talents and beauty, never catching any fish but such as were either not worth retaining, or, as, finding the bait not solid, were strong enough to struggle themselves free. Your brother was the last we heard of her attacking, and the result, I think, depends upon yourself!"

"I can scarcely feel that it does, when William has so particularly requested me to visit her. However, the picture you have drawn is so very repulsive that I will take a medium course by writing to him and begging to be excused."

Another hasty glance was exchanged between the sisters at this proposal. "No, no; it would not do at all," Miss Wilton said, with evident anxiety. "It would be betraying her. And was Lady Rosa mad, to expect a man in love to be capable of judging?"

"That I always thought a foolish observation," Lady Rosa said; "for it is before a man falls in love that he forms his judgment, be it true or false, and loves accordingly. If dear William

really does love this lady, I cannot be persuaded that she has not some amiable qualities ; and if he does not, why, according to you, she must have more, to induce him to recommend her so very ardently to me."

"I admitted that no one can be more amiable to men," Miss Wilton said, with peculiar coldness.

Lady Rosa fixed her eyes on her, inquiringly, anxiously, for a moment, and then blushing deeply, said in a tone of awful interrogation, "She is perfectly respectable, Frances?"

Miss Wilton hesitated.

Lady Rosa became almost breathless ; at last, without uttering a word, she rose and went towards the writing-table.

"What are you going to do, Rosa?" Miss Wilton asked.

"To write to my brother," she said, decisively. "The ambassador's bag goes this evening, and I have not five minutes to lose ; for, as he has forgotten to give his address as he travels, I must only send my letter as before, and trust to its being sent after him."

Miss Wilton sprang towards her, and even Susan approached her, though more slowly. "For Heaven's sake ! for my sake, forbear !" the former cried, seizing both her hands. "Rosa, you would not betray our friendship thus ? I begin to think indeed that you must have misunderstood my not answer-

ing your last question ! There are so many meanings for the word ‘respectable.’ She is *perfectly, unimpeachably* so, as the world understands it. In fact, her cold, unfeeling, calculating coquetry is the chief cause of my dislike of her.”

Before Lady Rosa had time to make any further inquiries or observations, a servant presented her a note, whose elegant but fanciful envelope, delicate perfume, and motto, “Je suis trop tard,” round a deer with an arrow sticking in its side, all pronounced it of foreign extraction. The moment Miss Wilton cast her eye upon it, she exclaimed, “She has cut the Gordian knot herself!”

Lady Rosa hastened to open the envelope, which merely contained an equally fanciful card, with “Viscountess St. Clair, — Hotel,” embossed upon it. Lady Rosa contemplated it for a moment in perfect silence. To her refined mind it seemed to confirm all, and more than all, Miss Wilton had implied. She knew that such modes of forming an acquaintance had sometimes been adopted, and with as much good-breeding as propriety ; but not, she believed, through the medium of a young man, an acknowledged admirer. She looked into the envelope once more, in the hope of finding a word of apology or explanation.

“What are you looking for, Rosa ?” asked Miss Wilton, sarcastically. “Why, you are insatiable !

Do you not perceive that this poor victim has thrown herself upon your mercy, and told you her whole story in the seal?"

The same idea had occurred to Lady Rosa, but she had endeavoured to dispel it. At that moment Lord Lisbrian entered the room. The moment he approached the table round which the young ladies stood, he exclaimed, "What delightful perfume is this? I pronounce whoever selected that perfume to be a lady of taste *comme il-y-en a peu*." And taking the envelope and card from his daughter's hand, he fell into ecstasies over what he called their tasteful elegance. "But who is Lady St. Clair?" he asked; "and what does it all mean?"

"Ay! thereby hangs a tale," Miss Wilton said.

"Oh! unfold it, then, by all means," he cried.

"I'm just in a humour for hearing tales."

Miss Wilton then repeated the substance of what she had already told.

"Why, what a delightful creature she must be!" was Lord Lisbrian's exclamation, to the surprise of all.

"Delightful?" repeated Miss Wilton; and Susan got up and left the room.

"Yes; upon my soul, I think so," he said. "What greater test can there be of a woman's excellence than the love of men and the envy of

women? Oh! by all means, Rosa, call upon her to-morrow, if you would not be set down as one of the envious ones."

"But don't you think, papa, it seems—that she has—rather thrust herself upon our acquaintance?"

"Oh! hang me, if I could ever feel that horror you all profess of people who seem anxious for my society. On the contrary, I take it as a good sign both in them and myself; and in a nice woman it must always be flattering. So, Rosa, I do entreat you'll call on her to-morrow. If you don't like her then, our visit to Ireland will give you an excellent opportunity for dropping her."

"You remember she has been an actress, papa? And if William really is in love with her—"

"Call him L'Estrange; that is his name now. Why, yes; that, I confess, I should not like. But I don't mind L'Estrange's loves much; they don't last long; and, at all events, if he is like his papa, opposition would only make him more determined; and, for the rest, if all the world is content to receive her as an acquaintance, why should not we? Then, if she is as poor as Miss Wilton thinks, it will be a charity besides; for my code of morals tells me that poor gentlewomen are quite as much objects of charity as paupers in the streets."

Lady Rosa winced at this ill-timed, inconsiderate observation; but she was speedily relieved by Miss Wilton's adding, "Especially when they

are young and pretty," in a perfectly unembarrassed tone. Lord Lisbrian acknowledged the amendment with a bow, which again froze his daughter's blood; but it, too, was taken in good part; and the subject was pursued until Lady Rosa, unable to take a part in it, and fearful that her silence might betray her conscious apprehensions, rose and retired for the night, somewhat before the usual time. As soon as Miss Wilton reached her own apartment, she found, as she expected, her sister waiting for her there. The moment she appeared, Susan asked her if she had succeeded.

"In what?" she asked, in return.

"In preventing the entrance of this wretch into the house! I left the room to give you the opportunity, as much as to prevent me from betraying myself; and if you have not availed yourself of it, I tell you once for all—"

"Did you, then, want me to tell the father, that, having won the son from you, she must not be admitted, lest she should win him also?"

"No! I did not want you to say this; but I know, that, when you please, you can do anything; and therefore it is that I insist—"

"Susan, do not be a fool. Think you, I have not quite as much interest as you can have in preventing Lady St. Clair from forming this acquaintance?"

"Oh! I do recollect now, that you were

jealous of her yourself at one time ; but I thought you were since convinced that your beloved had resisted her ?”

“ It is not that, Susan,” Miss Wilton answered, with inimitable self-command. “ But I do not think her influence over Lord Lisbrian will tend to our interests.”

“ Is not that what *I* say ?” Susan almost whimpered.

“ But I do not mean as you mean. The fear of a stepmother I thought a good *gare loup* for Rosa. But you see, even she, innocent child as I may call her, was not to be persuaded that the pretty widow was going to give up the handsome young heir-apparent for his father. No ; what I fear is, her influence as his daughter-in-law,—her knowledge, in short, of all our circumstances.”

Susan was somewhat comforted by hearing this, but still said, “ You’ll see she will be of the party to Ireland.”

“ No ! that she shall not be !” Miss Wilton exclaimed, rising from her chair with unfeigned vehemence, and looking like a Pythoness. “ But in order to prevent it,” she said, reseating herself,—“ in order to prevent it, Susan, you and I must accompany Rosa to call on her to-morrow.”

Susan uttered an exclamation.

“ Yes,” her sister continued ; “ it is all that is left for it. In order that the bonds may not break,

we must suffer them to relax a little. Lord Lisbrian has ordered his daughter to call upon this woman, because her note smelt sweetly, and we must take our choice for peace or war."

"War! war! war! then, say I," exclaimed Susan.

"Ay; to have her rake up every story she ever heard, not only of Charles, but—but—of ourselves and our religion, and have the whole family cast off in ignominy through her arts?"

"Oh! I forgot," answered Susan, sarcastically, "that I called her in that evening, in my fright, when I thought you were dying in consequence of whatever happened between you and your lover, and that she heard some of your ravings!"

"Susan, take care what you are about!" said her sister, as calmly as if she was not at the moment in danger of bursting a blood-vessel. "I can bear much, but I cannot bear all; and ask yourself what you will gain by goading me to desperation."

"I really don't want to goad you to anything."

"Listen to me, then. You have seen enough to guess that this woman's presence must be, at least, as distasteful to me as it can be to you. But I do not wish to afford her any further triumph; and therefore it is that I am forced to avail myself of circumstances, and temporize. While unacquainted with Rosa's gentle yielding temper, she will naturally be anxious and uncertain as to her

reception, and will be but too happy to accept of any good offices from us; and being by far too wise ever to do mischief for mischief's sake, or to make an enemy unnecessarily, she will thus become our dearest friend; for 'to live and let live' has ever been her prudent motto. But now, Susan, I am going to give you a proof at once of my unwillingness to deceive you, and reliance upon your good sense. She has not as yet formed any plan of flirting with Lord Lisbrian, because she has hitherto only thought of him as the father of her lover—probably, as a feeble, vulgar, old man. When she sees him, or rather, when he sees her,—now be rational, Susan, for a moment,—I should not be surprised, if there appears something that you might call flirtation between them; but if you will promise me, for the sake of your own, and all the deep interests involved, that you will bear with this for the very few days that it can last, I promise you in return that she does not accompany us to Ireland, and here is my hand upon it."

"But how can you promise me anything of the kind?" asked Susan, withholding her hand: "What power have you to prevent it?"

"That power which, as you said yourself just now, enables me to do anything I please; and I think I need not go over my interest in this matter. I cannot, however, drop the subject without pointing out what seems to have entirely escaped you,

and which yet ought, in common sense, to have some weight with you. How, then, can you suppose that I can myself be indifferent to seeing my sister a countess?" and again she held out her hand.

Susan suffered her to take hers this time; and though but half satisfied, said, with a sullen smile, "Well, if she does not go too far, I will try what I can bear;" and they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XV.

As if Lord Lisbrian were really instigated by the spirit of opposition which he alluded to the evening before, the moment he appeared at breakfast next morning, he declared that he had been dreaming all night of the exquisite perfume of Lady St. Clair's note, and repeated his request that the visit might be paid.

"I know it is only a fit of papa's sociability," his daughter, who was gradually beginning to see into his character, said to Miss Wilton as he left the room; "but still I am very glad to be compelled, by any means, to do as L'Estrange requested. I think I shall call on her about three o'clock. Shall you and Susan drive before or after?"

"Oh! we shall go with you," she answered at once.

"I mean, to call on Lady St. Clair," Lady Rosa

repeated, supposing she had not made herself understood.

“ Yes, I know. Susan and I will, if you permit us, accompany you. I have no objection, Rosa, to break a lance—nay, I should glory in it—to do you any good ; but there is no use in making an enemy without serving a friend.”

“ No, certainly ; but I really supposed she was one already.”

“ Oh ! not at all. On the contrary, we are very good friends, as you shall see.”

Lady Rosa had not yet advanced so far in the art of thinking as to judge her friends ; and when her reason would have prompted her to do so, she refused to listen to it.

One of Lady St. Clair’s winning amiabilities was a frank avowal of her poverty, yet she had taken up her abode in an expensive hotel, and in one of its most expensive suites of apartments. In her dress she always affected poverty, and made it the pretext for invariably wearing white muslin, which happened, more than anything else, to correspond with the fair, feminine, fragile style of her beauty. It was only gentlemen, indeed, who could be deceived by the pretext that the most costly French embroidery and lace were more economical than sterner manufactures ; while ladies, who envied the result, had no redress but to shake their heads, declare they knew better things, and wonder

how she was able to afford what *they* could not. It was then whispered that she wrote for magazines, and “made the inside of her head furnish the outside;” but as this was just about the time that Lord Byron seemed to admit that a lady’s stockings were not the worse for a little blue if she managed to conceal them gracefully with her petticoats, and as there never existed a more graceful manager of petticoats than the Viscountess St. Clair, no one was so rude as to peep further than she chose to display, and she smiled and went on her way, whatever it might be.

When Lady Rosa L’Estrange was shewn into the apartment where Lady St. Clair received visitors, she found her buried in a heap of downy cushions, with a novel in her hand; but no sooner did the name catch her ear, than, gliding forward, with somewhat of the movement of a sylph in disgrace with some higher power, she bent before Lady Rosa, and taking her hand, as if to lead her to a seat, seemed with difficulty to refrain from carrying it to her lips. Surprised, and somewhat embarrassed by this reception, Lady Rosa turned involuntarily towards the Miss Wiltons, and then it was that Lady St. Clair appeared for the first time to be conscious of their presence. Advancing towards them immediately, with an air admirably suspended between reserve and familiarity, words could not more plainly have expressed, “On

what terms do we meet ?” than did her mobile and practised countenance. “ On the best,” was the reply, in language as intelligible ; and by the time that it was given, the hostess and guests were sufficiently near each other to exchange a cordial embrace.

In the course of conversation the intended excursion to Ireland was, of course, alluded to. “ Happy beings !” Lady St. Clair exclaimed, looking from one to the other, “ to escape from the horrors of a London summer !” and she really did look so sad, and so disappointed, that Lady Rosa pitied her. When they rose to terminate the visit, and Lady Rosa, already outside the room-door, turned to make some observations to her companions, she was surprised to find they had lingered behind. In a moment, however, they rejoined her, with Lady St. Clair, who, holding a hand of each, and wearing the air and almost the appearance of a pleading child, said, “ May I—dare I already make a request of Lady Rosa L’Estrange ? This good, charitable creature,” holding up the hand of Miss Wilton, “ has most generously offered to sacrifice herself to me occasionally of an evening,—dare I ask it for this evening, as a reward for the humiliating confession that I am weary of myself ?”

Lady Rosa, in the utmost surprise and embarrassment at this speech, turned her eyes on Miss Wilton, whose face became of the deepest crimson at finding her manœuvre to keep Lady St. Clair

away from Belgrave Square by the hasty whisper, "I'll come and sit with you in the evenings," thus defeated by Lady St. Clair's counterplot. In her distress, she could think of nothing better than to endeavour to convey by a look to Lady Rosa how disagreeable to her was the proposal. Lady Rosa, however, became but the more embarrassed when she understood it; and believing that foreign licence had betrayed her friend into some civil speech, which was taken too literally, the only remedy that occurred to her upright mind was, to request Lady St. Clair to come to Belgrave Square instead. Lady St. Clair did not even pretend to conceal her delight, and promised for that very evening.

"You are very good," Lady Rosa said, "to excuse so unceremonious an invitation, which I really felt it a liberty to hazard; especially as we see no company whatever at present; and even my father is so occupied that we can never count on him with certainty."

"Naughty creature!" exclaimed Lady St. Clair, in reply, and whipping the hand of Lady Rosa, of which she had again possessed herself, "what have I to do with gentlemen's company now?" but perceiving that Lady Rosa hastily cast down her eyes, she quickly added, "I assure you I consider myself quite *veillée*." Lady Rosa accepted the *amende*, and repeated her adieux. As soon as they

were once more seated in the carriage, both sisters at once cried out, "Well, Rosa ! what do you think of her ?"

"Had I been left to my own thoughts," she replied, "I should say she was one of the prettiest and most fascinating persons I ever saw."

"But as it is—?"

"As it is, I must beg leave to suspend judgment ; for she is either very refined and naive, or—very much the contrary."

The evening of Lady St. Clair's debüt in Belgrave Square happened to be one which Lord Lisbrian passed at home ; and, when her Ladyship was shewn into the drawing-room, wrapped in the same simple, elegant, and particularly becoming demi-toilette which she wore in the morning, as Lady Rosa advanced to receive her, she whispered the word "Treacherous !" when she perceived him, and she had not forgotten the "playhouse whisper."

"It is only my father," Lady Rosa re-whispered, with more sincerity, as she led her forward and presented him ; and at the first glance, Lady St. Clair perceived that he was more like the brother than the father of his son. Before the evening was over, Lord Lisbrian decided that she was the most charming creature he had ever seen ; and, although deficient, even to a remarkable degree, in an ear for music, and much too frank and indolent

to affect a taste he did not feel, as she sang one pretty English ballad after another, with the playful ease and piquancy which, perhaps, only the stage can give to an English-woman, he listened with a degree of enthusiastic attention, which infinitely amused his daughter and the Miss Wiltons; but when he proceeded, with the utmost *bonne foi* to inquire the names of the various composers, and leaned over her shoulder, as if to find in the little black marks the solution of the mystery of his own admiration, they laughed outright, until even he and Lady St. Clair joined in their amusement.

When the ladies were retiring for the night, he detained his daughter, to urge her to shew Lady St. Clair every attention in her power. "A mere formal visit, or a cup of tea, is not following up a letter of introduction, and from a brother, too," he said. "Give her a general invitation, in whatever form will be most likely to induce her to accept it. I wish these Wiltons were away, and that we had a bed to offer her! But I'll tell you what I can do to help you, Rosa. I was thinking of it while she was looking so lovely, singing about shady groves. I know I can manage to take a holiday, now that Steen is returned; and we could get a few men, and go down to Richmond, and spend a very pleasant day there. It would, I feel, be very good for me, after all my fatigue, and would refresh me greatly; and you would be the better of it your

self, and all of us. Do, pray, settle it with her for the earliest day possible, and I'll take all trouble about it off your hands with pleasure, for you are a dear, good girl!"

Lady Rosa found it impossible to resist smiling at a discovery she had lately made of her father's talent for persuading himself that every wish he felt had some better motive. However, as she would have been sorry to see him undeceived, she merely said, half-playfully, "Do not forget, however, papa, that this lady is engaged to L'Estrange."

"Pooh! nonsense, child! do you take me for a boy? However, they did *not* say *engaged*."

Lady Rosa smiled again, and bade him good night.

The Richmond party took place; and Lady St. Clair availed herself of the "general invitation" as much as could have possibly been expected, and still Lord Lisbrian continued to think her the most agreeable and most charming of woman kind. But if Lady Rosa turned a deaf ear to Miss Wilton's assurances that his attentions were more than those of a father-in-law elect, and continued amiable and good-humoured; and if Susan was no less deaf to her assurances of the contrary, and was only by the most adroit management prevented from any indecent outbreak, the crisis approached which, in some degree, must prove which

was the true state of the case; and call on Miss Wilton for a fulfilment of the promise she had so solemnly pledged to her sister.

“Rosa,” said Lord Lisbrian, one morning that he had lingered so long in the breakfast-room as to make it evident he wished to speak with his daughter in private, “I wish you would invite Lady St. Clair to accompany us to Ireland?”

Lady Rosa uttered an exclamation of unaffected surprise. Connemara had not then become a fashionable resort; the new police was not established. Two months before, Lady Rosa had never expected to be called on to perform so heroic an expedition herself; and she still continued to think it an act of devotion on the part of her early friends which only the intended union of the families could excuse her for accepting.

“Why do you exclaim?” inquired her father. “You should give up that childish habit. But I must say, that if you invite *your* friends, it is a little hard if I may not invite *mine*.”

“My dear papa! do not speak as if our friends could be ever different.”

“They are, though, however. Those Wiltons are confounded spies; and as for that Susan, she has become an absolute horror to me. I am very sorry you invited them. If it were not for Lady St. Clair’s angelic sweetness, she could not, nor could I either, put up with that idiot’s inso-

lent looks and poutings, as if she had any claim on me! Indeed I would not as it is, only for my unwillingness to do anything that could make a misunderstanding between you and Sir Charles."

"Then you are reconciled to that matter again, papa?" Lady Rosa could not refrain from asking, but she cast down her eyes, lest their expression should be intelligible.

"Again! why, when was I ever dissatisfied with it? I am sure, Rosa, you will do me the justice to acknowledge, that, from first to last, I said your happiness should be my guide, and I say so still; and so much so, that only for the events that have occurred in our family being so public and so shocking, I would advise your being married at once, even before we go to Ireland, and you could then come over and help me openly to canvass for your husband,—eh?"

"To that plan I should never have consented," was Lady Rosa's answer, and it was given in a manner so different from her usual caressing playfulness, that her father stared at her in astonishment. She forced herself to maintain her look of cold dignity and decision, although her heart beat rapidly; and it was an era in her moral existence. Happy are those whose feelings are so correct as to supply, however gradually, the defects of education.

Lord Lisbrian remained in silent astonishment

for a few minutes, and then, in a tone of some anxiety, said, "Nothing has gone wrong, I trust, between you and Sir Charles? You are not offended at his absence? for I assure you he cannot help it. As you would not allow him to write to you, I hear from him almost every day; but as his letters are chiefly filled with business, especially since I told him of the plan of getting him into parliament, I seldom think of shewing them to you."

"It is quite unnecessary, I assure you," she answered, once more smiling her own sweet smile.

"Well, now that I seem to be forgiven, though I know not for what, may I repeat my request that you will invite Lady St. Clair to accompany us to Ireland?"

"Certainly, papa, I will, if you think it advisable; and I am sure L'Estrange will be very much obliged to you."

"L'Estrange! why should L'Estrange be obliged to me? What is it to L'Estrange? He will not be there."

"No; but he will be delighted to find how completely she has succeeded in rendering herself agreeable to you."

"Why, what is that to him? What has L'Estrange to do with the matter at all? I hope you are not going back to that school-girl stuff of fancying him

in love with a lady because he gives her a letter of introduction to his sister ?”

“ My dear papa, excuse me ; but I really have reason to think that my brother has paid her very serious attention, to say the least of it ; and that she has accepted it.”

“ Good God of Heaven !” exclaimed Lord Lisbrian, thrown off his guard by the gentle decision of his daughter’s manner. “ You do not mean to say that you have had any conversation with her to this effect ?”

“ No, certainly not,” she answered, hastening to relieve him from anxiety that was painful to herself to see ; “ but still I have reason for what I say.”

“ Pooh ! some stuff and malice of those cunning Wiltons, just to wheedle me into marrying that sentimental fool,—as if I would ! if there was not another woman in the world. Can you tell me, Rosa, when they were about it, at all, why they did not try for Frances ? She would be a devilish deal more likely of the two to catch me !”

Lady Rosa declared herself unable to answer this question, but she was amused to find the accession which her father’s vanity had latterly received.

Having pondered on this subject for a moment, he presently resumed, “ Now, just to convince you how utterly false such insinuations are, I will ac-

knowledge to you, that, the other day, when I received L'Estrange's letter, informing me that he was just setting out on that extensive tour with his young friend Lord Stepney, without having heard of the events in our family, or of your engagement with Sir Charles, I told it to her quite suddenly, for the purpose of seeing what effect it would have on her, and I give you my honour she never even changed colour, nor has shewn the very slightest anxiety since."

Lady Rosa only smiled in reply to this.

"Really, Rosa, you are very provoking, not to say ill-bred," her father said, perceiving it. "Can you not speak out, instead of sitting there implying all sorts of unpleasantnesses?"

"I beg your pardon sincerely, dear papa," she answered. "I know, indeed, that nothing can be more provoking, and consequently ill-bred, than conversing *at* others with oneself, and I was only betrayed into it from the embarrassing feeling of wishing to enlighten you, being still almost entirely in the dark myself. I have reason, then, to suspect that your information was not the first Lady St. Clair had had upon the subject of L'Estrange's tour."

Lord Lisbrian started, as if an adder had stung him, on hearing this; but presently recollecting himself, he said, "You know that is absolutely impossible!"

“Why, papa? You are aware she corresponds with him?”

“I know she does *not*! She received *one* short letter from him since her arrival in London, in answer to a few lines she wrote to him, thanking him for his introduction to us; and so far from making any mystery about it, she told me of it immediately.”

“Well, perhaps it may have been in that letter that he communicated his intentions; but certainly I think Susan Wilton betrayed that they were known to her before your letter arrived; although she afterwards, from some scruple which I did not understand, seemed sorry she had done so, and therefore I did not pursue the subject.”

“If this were true—” exclaimed Lord Lisbrian, after a pause of some moments, and with more emotion than his daughter had ever seen him betray; but before he had time to finish his sentence, Lady St. Clair herself, with that privilege of intimacy which she had now completely, though almost imperceptibly established, put her pretty head into the room, whispering, “Are you at home?” and Lord Lisbrian, snatching up his letters, and muttering some unintelligible apology about haste, rushed past her, and through the open hall-door into the street.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE next words exchanged in private between Lord Lisbrian and his daughter were, "Well, Rosa, did you invite Lady St. Clair to Ireland, as I requested yesterday you would?"

"My dear papa, no!"

"May I ask why?"

"Why, really, papa, I did not know that it had been definitely settled that it was to be so."

"Well, allow me to say now that it is; and I expect compliance." And he was leaving the room as if to avoid remonstrance, when the soft voice of his daughter, saying, "Certainly, Sir, if you desire it, I shall not delay," caught his ear, and made him hesitate. Still, however, he went on; and it was not until he was at the door that he turned, and said, "As to all that you told me about the letters, Rosa, it was, as I suspected, absolutely

false ; as I am beginning to think every word those Wiltons utter is,—the ladies, I mean ; Sir Charles is quite a gentleman in every respect.”

“ I hope so, papa.”

“ But I know it ; and, let me tell you, it is pleasant, after all, to have something more than our own observations to go upon.”

“ And may I ask what more you have, papa ?”

“ Lady St. Clair knew them all abroad, and she says so,” and even Lady Rosa, all unsuspecting as she was, could not be blind to the influence that now induced her father to wish to hasten her marriage ; but, as she knew it would be worse than useless to suggest this, she contented herself with asking—

“ And is she, also, your informant respecting the falsity of my friends ?”

“ No, nonsense ! Why should you suppose that, Rosa ? And, if she were, what object could she have, but to put us on our guard ? But, upon my honour, she did not exactly say that, for she is the sweetest-tempered person that ever lived ; but I see it myself in the things they insinuate of her.”

“ But surely, dear papa, it is nothing against her to be engaged to my brother ?”

“ Yes, but I think it would, though, be very much against her. If it were so, what business had she coming here in the manner she did ?”

“ Why, really, I think that is very easily ex-

plained. L'Estrange, I suppose, wished you to see and admire her, in order that you might be induced to overlook the prejudice you might naturally feel against her."

"Admire her! well, so I do, very much, I confess; but, for my soul, I cannot see what L'Estrange, or any of you, have to do with that; and, as to prejudices against her, I should like to hear what they could be?"

"Do you forget, dear papa, that she was an actress?"

"An actress! well, what of that? As a mere child, her partial parents exhibited her for her beauty."

"But I thought you yourself admitted that you would be sorry, on this account, that L'Estrange married her."

"Well, and I say now, I *should* be sorry he married her; and I say, moreover, I should not hear of it, nor ever see him, if he even thought of such a thing. I *do* think," he said, controlling the unusual vehemence with which he uttered these sentences,—“I do think that for the immediate heir of an ancient earldom it would be objectionable, although any other man might think himself happy in getting such a woman, be his rank what it might. So, pray, Rosa, let me hear no more lectures on these subjects; it is rather reversing the order of nature. I beg you will invite Lady St. Clair to-day, and do it cordially and kindly.”

“Certainly, papa. I shall not keep my promise to the letter, and break it to the spirit.” And she found it impossible to repress a gentle sigh. Lord Lisbrian, however, if he heard, did not think proper to notice it ; and, as if satisfied with her promise, left the room. Lady Rosa immediately went to the drawing-room, and inquired of her friends whether they had any reason to expect a visit from Lady St. Clair that morning ; adding, “For, if not, I must write an invitation to her.”

“For dinner to-day ?” Miss Wilton inquired, with some odd presentiment at heart.

“Oh, no !” said Lady Rosa, smiling ; “one requiring somewhat more preparation. Papa has commanded me to invite her to accompany us to Ireland.”

It was fortunate for the sisters, that, as she said this, she moved towards the writing-table, and sat down with her back towards them, so that they had time to exchange some signs, of desperation on one hand, and caution on the other ; and, finally, to resume some degree of composure, unperceived by her.

The first effects of it were Miss Wilton’s saying, “Well, Rosa, acknowledge at last that I was right, and that Lady St. Clair is omnipotent.”

“Oh, you mean papa’s admiration of her ?” replied his daughter ; and then to cover a little embarrassment, she turned to Miss Susan Wilton, and added, “It is so amusing,—is it not ?”

"*Very*," gasped out the unfortunate Susan, and clung to her chair for support. Lady Rosa then left the room to dispatch her note, and Miss Wilton, breaking from Susan, who actually endeavoured to hold her to listen to her reproaches, followed her immediately, and, overtaking her, asked if she was about to dispatch the note that moment. Lady Rosa, supposing Miss Wilton might have some commands for the servant, said no; at least that it would do quite as well an hour hence.

"Then I can take it for you," she said. "I promised Lady St. Clair to call upon her early this morning; and, if you will entrust the note to me, I will deliver it, and bring you her answer."

"Oh, thank you, that will do much better," Lady Rosa answered; "for I was rather sorry not to be able to see her myself, having promised papa to give the invitation most cordially; but so many people are to call on me this morning, by appointment, that it was impossible for me to get out; and I wished to give her as much time as possible to prepare, as I know papa ought to have been in Ireland long since; but you can say everything for me in addition to what I have written."

"Yes, I understand perfectly," said Miss Wilton, smiling expressively. "The fibs you find it impossible to utter yourself will, you think, be no longer such distilled through me." The colour

rushed rapidly over Lady Rosa's face ; but more from self-detection than displeasure.

“ It is dreadful to think how difficult it is to be sincere ! ” she said, with a look of consternation. Miss Wilton laughed—said it was—and, taking the note from her hand, significantly promised to manage for her to the best of her capabilities. She then returned to the drawing-room, literally afraid of leaving Susan any longer alone with her pent-up fury, and sat down quietly to listen to its explosion.

To the most bitter and unreasonable taunts which ensued, she scarcely vouchsafed a word in reply, except to reiterate her promise ; for she had not yet decided, even in her own mind, how it was to be performed ; and the only mode that occurred to her sunk her, even in her own estimation, so much more than anything of which she had yet been guilty, that she was unwilling to name it, until certain that no other resource remained. At last, however, Susan touched the nerve that never failed to vibrate, and Miss Wilton, more to terminate her own agony, than having come to any decision, produced the note with which Lady Rosa had entrusted her. As quick as it was possible for the thought to have occurred, so rapid was the movement with which Susan snatched it from her hand, and tore it into a thousand atoms ! Miss Wilton stood perfectly paralyzed. It was the

first step of her own scheme it is true, but she was not prepared for so speedy an execution. For a moment they stood silently gazing on each other, and then both were startled by a knock at the hall-door, which each, in her agitation, supposed to be that of Lady St. Clair herself. The next instant, however, the drawing-room door opened, and Sir Charles Wilton entered the room.

“Lady Rosa!” were the words he uttered in the tone most expressive of subdued rapture, as he rushed forward; but, finding only his sisters there, he cast a scrutinizing glance round, and then, very deliberately returning to shut the door, which, in his love-like haste, he had omitted. “Hey, girls! here’s a hubbub since I went away!” he exclaimed, as he shook a hand of each. “Why, I suppose the annals of history scarcely furnish greater revolutions in so short a time!—a bankrupt, an earl!—a pauper and a member of Parliament! But hey? what’s the matter?” looking from one to the other. “Has anything new occurred within those two days? for, upon my soul, I am become absolutely nervous with these ups and downs! Where’s Lady Rosa? Nothing wrong with her, I hope? Her head is not turned with her new rank, eh?”

“Oh, not the least; any pride she has runs quite the other way; and she appeals now from Lady Rosa to Miss L’Estrange.”

“*Tant mieux, tant mieux*, believe me; we must

keep her up to that ; but what, then, is the matter ? Some cursed quarrelling between yourselves ? Now, girls, how very ridiculous this is ! Upon my soul it is too bad. Just when we are upon the very point of reaping the fruits of all our speculations, and having the world our own way, to see you run the risk of ruining everything thus !—for, let me tell you, our amiability and harmony amongst ourselves—bless the mark !—went as far to winning my little wise Dulcinea, as my principles, politico-religio ! amen ! She often told me so, I assure you ; for she was just fresh from her grammar, which gives, as one of its examples, that a good brother is sure to make a good husband, and so forth. So, now, what is the matter ?”

“ Susan is jealous of Lady St. Clair !” said her sister, abruptly.

“ Well, but come, that’s an old story, long past and gone, and neither of the parties here. She cannot be reviving that now.”

“ Lady St. Clair is here, and Susan is in love with Lord Lisbrian !” Miss Wilton replied again in the same tone.

Sir Charles leaned back in his chair, and just prevented himself from uttering a prolonged whistle ; but, happening to catch a glimpse of his younger sister’s face, he saw that she was in no mood to be goaded further. It was literally black, while her lips alone were blanched, and

quivering with fury. He was unaffectedly frightened; and, changing his whole tone and manner at once, without seeming to have observed her, he said, "The devil! Frances? You don't mean really to tell me that Lady St. Clair is in England? That is bad news!"

Susan already began to breathe more freely. "Not at all, if we manage her properly," Miss Wilton said. "She has been sent over by William, now Lord L'Estrange, to coax the father to allow him to marry her, and, finding us established here, is, for the present, our most obedient, humble servant."

"God keep her so, say I! for you know she could tell tales—of poor me, at all events—that, with such a little goose of a puritan as has fallen to my lot, might ruin all, at the eleventh hour; and, that she has not done so yet shews, that, after all, there is some good in her."

"She has had something else to do—eh?" said Susan, sullenly, and they were the first words she uttered; her brother turned to her with the most propitiatory deference; she said no more, however; but he ventured now to ask Miss Wilton, in a low tone, what she alluded to about jealousy, making her a sign at the same time not to exasperate Susan any further. Miss Wilton told him the cause.

"But do you know," he said, "this is not such

a bad speculation of Susan's, by any means. I am not at all sure it is not the best any of us have hit on yet." Susan looked triumphant. "Well done, Susan, my girl!" he cried, encouraged by the look, and clapping her on the shoulder. "I did not indeed bargain for a mother-in-law; but my own sister, I do think, I could endure. You'll be an indulgent mamma, wont you, Susan?" and Susan absolutely smiled. "As for the fair Viscountess," he continued, following up his victory; "if she really has any such designs, she will be like the dog and the shadow, with the moral, 'grasp all, lose all.' No, no, Susan! do you just give her rope enough, and my life for it, she hangs herself; and it would not be *selon les regles* for you to take precedence, by walking out of the world before her ladyship. And now, girls, let us talk a moment, while we are alone, of other matters. What do you think of that alarm about the bank, Frances?"

"Why, Lord Lisbrian makes very light of it, and seems to think it was merely accidental. However, now, at all events, it must be safe with this Irish inheritance to support it."

"*Cela depend.* Irish inheritances are not always support. However, this expedition will enable us to judge; and I must look sharp. In the meantime, if I had asked a boon from Heaven, it would have been to put me into Parliament, for Lisbrian tells me that my inamorata will not hear

of marriage for some months to come ; and, faith ! she might by that time have had to seek me in the fleet. The estate is even worse than I had any idea of."

Both sisters looked blank at this intelligence ; but in the countenance of the younger there was also an expression of sullen incredulity. Sir Charles probably saw it, for he continued, "As to those forms of acquittal that you gave me for your little portions, they will, after all, I fear, be of no use whatever ; there are so many other debts swallowing up the property."

"Then give them back to us," said Susan, simply. Her brother looked hard at her.

"If I had them here, I might as well," he said. "Although—" but there he stopped. Presently, however, he continued, "Thank God, it signifies but little now ; for if all is right about the bank and the Irish property, I shall be able to pay you both out of that. If the second deed had been available, indeed, I might have done it sooner, that's all, and saved the estate," and he sighed a sigh of resignation.

"I thought you always said it was available?" retorted Susan, with scarcely a change of countenance at this confirmation of her own previous information.

"No; I never said so, positively; else, why should I wish you to sign it again? It is just that sort of

thing that some timid spirits will object to, because it would bear an action, although certainly would be cast ; and some do not like the trouble of defence, even when certain of success. The man with whom I had to deal—I mean, the man who wants to foreclose and sell the property is one of these.”

“ But, Charles,” interrupted his elder sister, “ will you really venture to stand for a county on the Orange interest, where half the population are Catholics, and will certainly find out all about us ? ”

“ Will I ? Don’t I tell you it is the only thing on earth that could enable me to keep my head above water till this girl comes out of her heroics ? And as to my family having been Catholic, why that will only make me more acceptable, as a convert, to those who have the power of returning me ; and for the rest, why I’ll whisper them that their interests are safer with me than with any one who never felt the efficacy of holy water.”

“ But are there not some circumstances, some damning signs, that may shew your conversion was very recent ? ”

“ Oh, you mean those refractory fellows who would not promise to vote for the liberal member, and were dismissed ? Oh, why, you know, that was so soon after my father’s death that it is easy to confound dates a little, and set that good deed down to his account ; and then, you know, as we were all on the Continent, the steward may have

exceeded or misunderstood orders. Oh, trust me, Fanny, I never was foiled yet when it came to speechifying or professions. But where is Lady Rosa all this time? methinks it is but civil to inquire. Am I not to see her this morning?"

"She said she should be particularly engaged; indeed, she generally is in the mornings; but she will, I am sure, relax in your favour."

"I am not by any means sure of that. It is one of her whims to treat me exactly as if we had only met yesterday. I give you my honour I have never yet presumed to kiss her hand; and you may guess whose fault that is."

"Still she will break through any little engagement or rule to come down to receive you, for she makes a point to do exactly what she thinks right in these points, as, indeed, to do the child justice, in all others."

"We must see the more to her code of morals, that's all. Go, then, and tell her I am at the last extremity."

"Go, Susan, love; you might," Miss Wilton said; "I have gone to her so often."

"Yes; that you and Charles may talk secrets! But I care not; I can take care of myself, and you'll find it!"

"Faith, and it might be so!" her brother said, musingly, as she left the room. "Is there any-

thing at all in this new fancy she has taken, Frances? But of course not; it is like the rest?"

"If possible, more unfounded still," Miss Wilton answered. "He absolutely hates her. But I'll tell you what *has* foundation, her surmises of a match between Lord Lisbrian and Lady St. Clair; they are inviting her to be of the party to Ireland, and, just as you entered the room, Susan snatched, and tore to pieces, the invitation with which Rosa had entrusted me. I was afraid to tell you before her, for fear of some uncontrollable outbreak; and, you see, she was afraid to allude to it herself."

"By heavens, this is a grave matter," Sir Charles said, looking more than serious; "that girl will ruin us yet, between her violence and her groveling propensities. I am glad you did not tell me suddenly before her. Frances, your ingenuity must patch up this business, as it has done many another; and if it does, I shall hardly regret it; for this fellow taking it into his head to marry now would be to ruin my expectations, especially a cunning, worldly minx, like Lady St. Clair. We must put a stop to that at any risk."

But before they had time to settle what risk would suffice, Lady Rosa accompanied Miss Susan Wilton back into the room, and the subjects took a very different turn.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Sir Charles Wilton rose to terminate his visit, his sister asked for his escort to Lady St. Clair's hotel. As soon as they found themselves in the street, Sir Charles inquired what she intended to say or do.

“Do not ask me, Charles,” she said, almost wildly. “To you I need not say that I am not over particular; yet direct,—I mean, treacherous lies,—treacherous, complicated lies, I have never yet been called upon to tell. I trust I may still be able to escape them, for they are dangerous at best. In short, leave me to act as I may find necessary at the moment; and suffer me to remain in the delusion that I shall not be guilty of malice prepense. You say we are at the summit of our hopes; but I say, if we are, the summit is a pinnacle so unsteady, that one unguarded movement

precipitates us all into the abyss beneath. It is indeed 'neck or nought' with us at last."

Not another word was uttered until they arrived at Lady St. Clair's hotel; there they parted, Sir Charles pressing her hand, with confidence in her determination.

Miss Wilton found Lady St. Clair in her usual position, buried in pillows of pale blue damask, which harmonized beautifully with her transparent paleness. Miss Wilton immediately led to the Irish expedition, and, with a beating heart, though in a rallying tone, hinted at Lord Lisbrian's wish for the addition of Lady St. Clair's company. The slightest tinge of colour passed over the lady's cheek, but she remained perfectly silent. Miss Wilton was forced to hint further; and she still persuaded herself that she was speaking truth when she intimated how different were the feelings of his daughter. Still Lady St. Clair preserved unbroken silence; and Miss Wilton, beginning to fear she was becoming sullen, assumed the tone of friendly admonition. Delicately and distantly, however, did she venture upon it, fearful lest every added word should produce one of those scenes to which the most fragile women are equal. What was her astonishment, then, when, having exhausted all she had to say, hint, or imply, without the stimulus of the least appearance of displeasure, or even remonstrance, Lady St. Clair, with the utmost apparent

sweetness, took her hand, and thanking her with an appearance of sincerity which astonished, if it did not convince her, thanked her for her advice that she should refuse the invitation, and promised to be implicitly guided by it. Miss Wilton was so frightened by this unnatural compliance that she almost wished to retract what she had said, especially when Lady St. Clair abruptly, but with seeming simplicity, said, “And could he not even prevail on her to write me an invitation?” Miss Wilton thought it better, then, to say that Lady Rosa had entrusted the note to her—and she searched her bag for it, but in vain. Lady St. Clair said it was of no consequence, and seemed satisfied—and she was so—but she did not tell Miss Wilton that she had that morning received a letter from Lord L’Estrange, in reply to alternate pleadings and remonstrances from her, on the subject of his prolonged absence, and a petition to know his final determination respecting her; containing a hasty promise to return home immediately and “speak to her;” but adding, that, as this must in some degree depend on his companion, he should not write to announce his intentions to his father until more certain when he could fulfil them. This letter produced a revolution in Lady St. Clair’s plans and feelings. Lord L’Estrange was not, she knew, a young man whose constancy was likely to stand the ordeal of a visit to all the courts

of Europe; and in the alternative, his father was not a despicable second string; and it was more to escape his future resentment, by forcing him to acknowledge his own change of feeling, than in any other hope, that she persecuted him with petitions to decide her fate. At once thoughtless and good-natured, however, he felt that to say so delicately would require more trouble than to promise to come home; and little guessing how far he was interfering with her plans by doing so, he gave the promise accordingly, and she at once made up her mind to wait for him in London, and then make the most of the time that he might remain. Unwilling to excite conjecture by more conversation than was necessary on the subject of her declining the invitation to Ireland, she was herself the one to say that it was unnecessary to give Lady Rosa the trouble of writing another note, by telling her that her first had been mislaid, as she could write an answer quite to the purpose, without having seen it.

Miss Wilton was but too happy to agree to this, and, promising to take better care of this trust, returned to Belgrave Square more mystified than she had ever been in her life before. She felt nervous and wretched the remainder of the day; for she feared that Lady St. Clair only waited to avenge herself for her interference, by revealing all in an interview with Lord Lisbrian himself. In this, however, she was mis-

taken. An ill-tempered or a candid woman—and they are sometimes confounded, especially by the parties themselves—might have done this;—but Lady St. Clair was neither ill-tempered nor candid; on the contrary, she was extremely prudent; and, besides that, it was one of her invariable rules never wantonly to make an enemy. She thought it much wiser to suffer her refusal to appear the effect of womanly reserve and dignity than either fear of Lord L'Estrange or spite against Miss Wilton. Miss Wilton did not know this, however; and it was not until Lord Lisbrian, having absented himself from dinner, came into the drawing-room in the evening, at an hour that shewed he had not been dining out, where Sir Charles Wilton was sitting with his sisters and Lady Rosa, and, in a state of irritation that might have announced another run on the bank, inquired if they could all be ready to start for Ireland next morning, that she felt certain she had not been betrayed. In her eagerness to prevent any further opportunity for it, she hastily declared that she, for one, could be ready at any moment. But Lady Rosa, all anxious as she had been that her father should not be unnecessarily detained, was obliged to beg for one day more for her preparations; which being as churlishly granted by him as if London had suddenly become infected by the plague, the journey was fixed for the day but one succeeding;

and, without having sat down, he instantly withdrew again. There was not a comment made on his conduct by any one who remained; and yet there was not one of them, unless, perhaps, Miss Susan Wilton, who did not guess that he had received more than one refusal that day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As if by mutual, though tacit consent, from the moment that the day for the journey to Ireland was decided upon, Lady St. Clair's name was not pronounced in Belgrave Square; and though Lady Rosa felt, in her own breast, as if she had done her injustice, for which she would gladly have atoned, she thought it better to confine her feelings there than to express her approbation of an assumption of dignity, however recent, which she knew would offend her father. The first allusion that was made to the subject was when the carriages which were to convey the party from London were at the door, and the ladies were leaving the breakfast-room in search of shawls and bonnets; Lord Lisbrian took that opportunity to call his daughter aside, and say to her, "Rosa, I request you will take care that I am not pestered with either of those girls

during any part of the journey ! Pray attend to this, and don't oblige me to be uncivil. You three ladies may travel in the barouche, as you always prefer it ; Sir Charles and I in the phaeton ; and the women may have the chaise. He will, of course, endeavour to alter this plan ; but I trust to you to adhere to it. I cannot submit for ever to please every one but myself ; and, upon my soul, I should sooner give up the whole journey, bank and all, than have to play the agreeable to either of those two ; not that I think as ill of them as I did, for I begin to believe all women are fools and coquettes alike, to the very last degree !”

“Thank you, papa !”

“Oh yes ! you may thank me, but you have a touch of it yourself, my young lady, or you would have married this man at once, instead of keeping him dangling after you for months ; and if you had, perhaps—however, it's over now, and there's no hurry about it ; on the contrary, the longer you stay with me now the better ; for, after all, Rosa—however, it's no matter. Run and get your mufflings, and remember what I said to you.”

Lady Rosa obeyed her father exactly in the travelling arrangements ; and although Sir Charles whispered somewhat to her about his hard fate, he was too well aware that it was quite as necessary for him to conciliate the father as the daughter to manifest any deep regret in taking his place beside

Lord Lisbrian ; and they arrived at Oxford without any accident, moral or physical, worth recording. They were there received by Hubert L'Estrange, Lord Lisbrian's second son, who, now within a few months of one-and-twenty, was, like his other two children, handsome and fashionable in his appearance ; but more than this scarcely any of the party knew of him ; for, without being absolutely reserved, the quiet gentleness of his character caused him to appear so when under the influence of his brother's more confident temper and jovial spirits ; and, while these latter propensities, as resembling his own, rendered the elder son the favourite of his father, they were also the most attractive to the timidity of a youthful sister ; and thus Hubert had hitherto been as little known as appreciated by his own family. The Miss Wiltons he had never seen before ; and Sir Charles was on the point of leaving Eton and Oxford successively, at an unusually late age, as Hubert went to each particularly early, and might therefore be said to be an utter stranger to him also.

But years and circumstances had wrought a change in the young man. No longer contrasted with his brother, and in the present instance feeling himself, as it were, in his place, he fulfilled its duties gracefully and effectually ; and the projected union between the families rendering it every one's interest to be pleased, before the evening closed in,

he was felt by all to be a valuable acquisition to their party, and Lady Rosa began to wonder why she had so decidedly determined that her elder brother was her favourite.

On one subject alone did she feel any drawback in her admiration of Hubert—it was politics. He had not indeed said much, but when Lord Lisbrian, who also evidently yielded with delight to the influence of his opening character and polished address, communicated to him his intentions respecting the election with all the violence of newly acquired influence, Hubert cast down his eyes, and asked him if he could rely so confidently upon a people amongst whom he had never yet been. There was, or might be, nothing in the words, but something, she could not exactly tell what, alarmed her in the manner; and when Lord Lisbrian vehemently answered that he could; that he knew the agent was an excellent, devoted fellow, on whom he might place implicit confidence; and that, of course, he could manage the people as he pleased, she remarked that he suffered the subject to drop, more from an unwillingness to express a difference of opinion, than from not having formed one.

This, however, seemed to her a calamity so fearful, so unexpected, that she dismissed it from her mind with the flattering unction that, either it was not so, or, if so, would be speedily cured in one so gentle, intelligent, and affectionate; and she was

confirmed in this conviction by observing that Sir Charles Wilton seemed to take a most particular interest in the young man, while Frances adopted him at once as a younger and beloved brother. Even Susan was in good humour; for, although, at first, displeased and disappointed at the travelling arrangements, yet, as every mile removed them further and further from her detested rival, so she considered each as a leaf added to her own wedding garland; and, although Lord Lisbrian positively shunned her during the evening, yet, as he could not escape from the room, and had no Lady St. Clair with whom to occupy himself, she was comparatively happy, and determined to trust the rest to the two great conquerors of difficulties, Time and Perseverance.

The travellers slept at Oxford that night; and next morning, Lord Lisbrian's servants having been sent back to London, the distribution of the parties was only so far altered that Hubert and Sir Charles alternately occupied the box of the phaeton, while Hubert's servant took his place behind the barouche. In this order they proceeded each day, until the Hollyhead packet compelled them to submit to its arbitrary rules, on pain of having them very unpleasantly enforced.

Landed on the Irish shore, no preparation to which they had endeavoured to subject their minds, no recollections or descriptions of Mrs. Kelly's

accent, nor any other accent they had ever heard or conceived, served in the least degree to lessen the amazement, terror, and confusion, which seized upon each of the three young ladies, and was betrayed by each according to their different nerves and dispositions. From Miss Wilton, every offer of service from the crowd of ragamuffins surrounding her produced an irrepressible, but angry start; from her sister, a faint shriek; and from Lady Rosa, a terrified, deprecatory bow, or attempted smile. Arrived at the hotel, in Sackville Street, to which they had been recommended, although obliged to acknowledge that the hotel itself, no less than the street in which it was situated, not only far exceeded anything they had hoped to find in Ireland, but were, in themselves, deserving of admiration, the state of nervous excitement into which they had been thrown was not to be overcome by such rational appeals to common sense; and when dinner appeared, Susan declared she was afraid to raise a particularly large silver cover, lest O'Connell himself should spring up from beneath it.

Though tolerably accustomed to the noise of London, and most of the party to that of other towns, every shout in the street sounded to them so unearthly that they started simultaneously from their seats; and when, after dinner, the gentlemen spoke of strolling out to look at the town, as they were to set out early next morning for the south,

Lady Rosa turned as pale as death, and hastily laid her hand on her father's arm. He was not a person, however, who understood the agony of nervous terror; and, as neither of the others had observed her, they set out, leaving the ladies to comfort each other as they could.

In about two hours Lord Lisbrian and his son returned, saying, that Sir Charles had met with a college acquaintance who had insisted upon his going home with him, to be introduced to his mother and sisters, but promising to release him almost immediately. The Miss Wiltons expressed some slight curiosity to know who this college companion might be; but Lady Rosa received the intelligence in perfect silence; and, after some time, unable any longer to endure the suspense, making a sign to her father to accompany her to a distant part of the room, she endeavoured to assume an appearance of most heroic firmness, as she gasped out, "Papa! believe me, I may be trusted! You cannot indeed deceive me; you may be right not to inform his sisters too abruptly, but I assure you I am quite prepared to hear whatever may have befallen Sir Charles Wilton!" Her father looked on her in bewilderment for a moment; then, recollecting her previous alarm, burst into such a fit of laughing as startled every one in the room; and, breaking from her, without any other satisfaction, explained the cause of it to the company. The subject had

not been wholly dismissed when a waiter brought in a note for Lord Lisbrian, which, having read, he handed to his daughter.

It was a long and elaborate apology from Sir Charles Wilton, expressing the most poignant regret at being unable to accompany them on their journey next morning, his assistance to extricate his friend from a most unpleasant business having been requested in a manner that he found it impossible to elude; and, as he should be detained until a late hour where he then was, he was compelled to be satisfied with that mode of adieu until the following day, when, he said, it was quite impossible that anything should prevent his joining them at Lisbrian Castle. Once more Lady Rosa gave a scrutinizing peep at her father's countenance, but, as he caught her eye, and seemed about to go off in another roar of laughter, she hastily withdrew it, and they retired to rest in tolerable composure, only specifying that all the bed-rooms should be as near as possible to each other, and examining the locks of the doors and bolts of the windows with the utmost caution.

As the town and castle of Lisbrian lay upwards of seventy Irish miles south of Dublin, the travellers set out at an extremely early hour next morning, with the intention of arriving there before evening, having, by the advice of the waiter at the hotel, written to order horses at the different stages along

the road ; and by his suggestion, also, leaving the phaeton for Sir Charles Wilton, as he very sagely observed it was “ better to lave it there than on the road, for want of horses to bring it on.” Lord Lisbrian and his son, then, occupied the chariot, with the women on the box, the ladies still preferring the barouche, in order, as Miss Wilton observed, that they might be better able to watch against surprises.

During the earlier part of the day, however, there appeared not the least necessity for this or any other extraordinary precaution. They were regularly supplied with horses, and if the postilions’ dresses were not exactly like those of England, why, every country has its costume. In short, the ladies were beginning to think they might draw in their heads, and suffer their watchfulness to relax, and the gentlemen to say what a shame it was to libel such a country, when it seemed as if they were destined to experience some, at least, of the stories they had heard, and the adventures they had dreaded.

They had proceeded about six miles of their last stage, under the guidance of a lovely summer moon, when Miss Wilton, whose attention never wholly slumbered, perceived that the driver of Lord Lisbrian’s carriage was leaning over, so as to make some sign, to her unintelligible, to the man who drove theirs, which the latter no sooner

caught than, wheeling round in his saddle, so as to have a full view of the ladies, he secured the rim of his hat firmly between his finger and thumb, by way of taking it off, and pointing to some object in the distance with the flail which he denominated a whip, he uttered the words, "Lish-na-brine!" and grinned a most knowing and familiar grin in their faces.

"Shall I shriek?" whispered Miss Wilton; and Susan was just preparing to do so, when Lady Rosa, whose natural good sense and benevolence made her struggle hard on every occasion to retain her self-possession, gasped out, "No, no! not yet! but tell Gilmore to ask him what he wants." Gilmore immediately called out, "I say, postilion, pray what do you want to say?" But, besides that nothing is more offensive to the native Irish than the interposition of one of their own class between them and "the quality," especially with "the English accent," which they cannot be persuaded is not affected on landing for the purpose of humbling them, the indispensable "I say" never fails to sound insulting in their ears. Accordingly, our friend Tim Murphy, highly indignant at Gilmore's address, but deeming contemptuous silence at once the safest and most dignified revenge, without giving the slightest intimation of having heard the question, continued to grin in the ladies' faces, although now the expression of his countenance had become absolutely fearful.

Once more, however, Gilmore addressed him, and now more loudly and determinately than before; and as he perceived that by this time Lord Lisbrian's carriage, probably attracted by the call, was slackening its pace, and the gentlemen looking out, poor Tim was forced to capitulate; and, in a voice of the most sarcastic rage he ironically repeated, "*I say? You say, do you? Whethen, I say you're nothin' but a stupid, foolish crathur! and when you larn to spake plain, widout clippin' the King's English, maybe a body'd answer you; and you'll have to larn that soon, ma bouchal, I tell you!*" And then turning once more to the ladies, who were now all shrieking together, and resuming his hold of the rim of his hat, which he had carefully relinquished while addressing the servant, he condescended to explain, in a voice which effectually drowned theirs, "Sure, it's Lish-na-brine, your honour's home, I'm a showin' yez, in the dishtance!" And, without waiting to see how the information was received, he resumed his original position, and called to his horses to "go an!" in a tone that shewed his consciousness, that by them at least he could make himself understood.

Such, however, was the state of nervous terror into which the young ladies had by this time worked themselves, that, between it and the strangeness of the man's accent, not one of them had yet the least idea of what he intended to con-

vey ; and they were yet endeavouring to conjecture what it could be, when they perceived a horseman galloping towards them, who, on arriving alongside of Lord Lisbrian's carriage, made a full stop : but, as the postilion also drew up, by Lord Lisbrian's orders, suddenly struck the spurs into his horse and passed both it and the ladies' carriage in a gallop, with his head conspicuously turned the other way. This was an incident rather alarming in itself ; but when, once more, precisely the same process was repeated, and that Miss Wilton, on looking out, perceived that the person had changed his course, and was now following them, though, like the spectre ship, "never the nearer," Lady Rosa herself thought it time to send to tell the gentlemen of the circumstance, as being probably connected with the driver's previous conduct ; Miss Susan Wilton adding, " And pray inform him that I have always heard that is the way they rob and murder in Ireland."

Lord Lisbrian sent for answer that he recommended that their carriage should precede his ; but that, as long as the assailants confined themselves to that method, he could do nothing more than keep his pistols in order ; in corroboration of which he held them out at the carriage-window as the ladies passed, a practical proof of preparation, which produced anything but the desired effect on those whom he meant to re-assure. And before

they had time to reason themselves out of their alarm,—the carriage having turned a sharp angle of the road,—they found themselves surrounded by such a multitude of men, women, and children, as not only rendered it impossible for them to proceed a step further, but might have justified them in believing that all Ireland was in rebellion, and had selected that spot for their rendezvous.

Their sensations now were too fearful for common exclamations. They grasped each other's hands; and, unconsciously both to the actor and the sufferer, squeezed them in a manner that no persuasion could have induced them an hour before to believe they could have either endured or inflicted. What was stranger still, the multitude was comparatively as silent as they were; but it was not without a supernatural effort that they restrained the national shout in which an Irishman gives vent to feelings that might otherwise become dangerous; and anxiously, eagerly, greedily did they look for the least symptom of a disposition in any one to throw off the unnatural restraint, although no one cared to be the first to disregard the remonstrance that had been made against it. The coveted signal came at last from an unexpected source.

The moment Gilmore perceived the carriage had stopped, and yet that no violence was offered, he called out once more in the same unconsciously offensive accents to the driver to proceed. But Tim,

now certain of support and sympathy, coolly jumped down, and flinging the reins amongst the people, deliberately answered, "No, no, my lad! no more of your capers now! I've done wid yez for one while, and the biys must have their turns at yez now!" And he stood back while they proceeded to take the horses from the carriage. Unfortunately, the ladies caught and understood the words, and Miss Susan Wilton, wholly overcome with terror, lost all command of herself, and began wildly shrieking out, "Ha! ha! ha!" in fearful, hysteric laughter, which those at a distance, mistaking it for the desired shout, swelled with all their might; and presently the very heavens themselves seemed to echo with the sounds, "hurra! hurra! musha, then, hurreeo! for evir and evir, amin!" and the unfortunate girl who had so unintentionally led the way in this uproar was by it driven to such frenzy that it was with difficulty she was withheld from flinging herself from the carriage, reckless alike of life or reason.

It was in this emergency that a decent-looking poor woman, who, standing near the carriage, and perceiving that the young lady was taken ill, and believing, from the suddenness and violence of her seizure, that some one in the crowd had given her "an evil eye," with as pure and simple-minded an exertion of benevolence as ever animated Grecian daughter, swung herself up on the wheel of the

carriage, and, muttering some Irish incantation as she did so, spat hastily two or three times into her face !

It is utterly impossible to give the remotest idea of the effect this act produced. With the young lady herself it seemed perfectly to have succeeded ; for she became as suddenly calm, silent, pale, and motionless, as if she had been struck dead ; while Miss Wilton started to her feet with fury ; and Lady Rosa, who the moment before had begun to indulge in some faint glimmering of the real meaning of this reception, now dismissed the flattering illusion, and burst into tears. At this moment, Lord Lisbrian's carriage was borne past them in triumph, drawn by the people, while he and Hubert, little imagining their situation, and only catching partial glimpses as they moved, kissed their hands, and nodded to them in evident delight. In the meantime, Gilmore, who, seeing the insult offered to the young lady, had flung himself from the box, regardless of the density of the crowd beneath, and was proceeding to take summary vengeance upon the offender, when two or three men seizing him in his turn, one of them called out, " Be quite wid yourself ! What is it ye mane at all, at all, ye powdhered Sprissihawn ! by thratin' a faymale that aways ? Hadn't ye a tongue in your head to ask her civilly to come down aff iv your carriage ? "

“How dared she spit in the lady’s face?” retorted the Englishman, pale with rage.

“Musha! what spit? Is it dhrunk you are, my gossoon, this blessed evenin’?”

But here the poor woman, pale and trembling from the uproar she had most innocently and most unintentionally occasioned, as well as from the rude grasp she had in consequence encountered, interposed, crying out, “Asy, asy, Darby, avich! never heed it! Sure I beg his pardon; and I humbly beg the young lady’s pardon,” she said, timidly raising her eyes to the insulted carriage, and dropping her best curtesy. “But surely the last thing on earth I thought of was to give iffince by what I done intirely for the besht!”

“But what did you do, Molly O? for I’ll know that before I let the mane spalpeen of an undecent crathur go!” questioned Darby.

“Whethen, I done nothin’ at all, at all; but to make as tho’ to spit on her for look, when I seen her tarin’ and schreein’ like to go mad, and knowin’ it was somethin’ not right was at her.”

“Now, you savage!” exclaimed the footman, in a tone of mingled triumph and fury, “I hope you’re satisfied by her own confession!”

“What satisfied? You savage yourself! and a powdhered savage into the bargain, to make you the more comical!” retorted Darby, relaxing his grasp, however, as he spoke. “What did the

crathur do but thry to fricken the *good people* from saizin' her, and may be, carryin' her off bodily."

If the young ladies had required any confirmation of their worst apprehensions, they believed that they received it now, in what seemed to them an open declaration of the hostile intentions of the people. However, gathering from it, also, that they were not unanimous in their designs, they cast their eyes eagerly through the crowd in search of succour; and Miss Wilton, catching those of a spruce, dapper-looking young man fixed upon them, whose dress, if not superior in its way, had more pretension than that of the rest, made eager signs to him to advance, which he was not slow to do, jostling those who obstructed his passage with sudden assumption; and when arrived at the carriage door was evidently undecided as to whether it would be humbling himself too much before the multitude to take off his hat. His salutation was, in consequence, particularly grotesque; but Miss Wilton, whose opinion of the Irish was just then at its lowest ebb, saw nothing in all this to prevent her asking him if he were a magistrate, or any person in authority, who could read the Riot Act, and order out the military to disperse the people; adding, that she was sure a very few shots would do it.

Perhaps that was the proudest moment in the life of him whom she addressed. The colour

rushed into his face ; he adjusted his cravat ; set his hat more to one side of his head ; glared round on all who stood within hearing ; and then, in mincing and studied accents, by which he trusted not to efface the favourable opinion conceived of him, he began, “ No, ladies ; no ! I am not as yet a magistrate or captain ; I am Gulielmus Bartley, at your sarvice, pedagogue of all the ignorant multitudes you see around you ! Although, by the new changes that’s everywheere comin’ upon the earth, you will scarcely believe me, ladies, if I tell you there are those who talk of my not being fit to scourge a few dirty boys in the new-fashioned form ! But now that the light of your majesty shines upon us, I see things will go right, and every one have his due.” And his speech having now assumed somewhat of the semblance of a petition, he was betrayed into taking off his hat.

Miss Wilton, with difficulty forbearing from assuring him it was not to hear of his views in life that she summoned him, now related to him the insult her sister had received, and requested to know how she could ensure the offender’s being taken into custody. Mr. Bartley held up his hands and eyes in affected astonishment, and then looked round upon the poor shrinking woman, with what he intended to be either a magisterial or military frown ; but Darby, her champion, stood by her still.

“Come, come; none o’ *your* capers any way, Billy Bartley!” he exclaimed. “The ladies, indeed, bein’ sthrangers, may not undherstand our ways; but as for you, it ill becomes your mother’s son to make light of the evil eye, if all’s thrue; so no more o’ your frowns, but explain this minute to the lady that no offence in life was intended her.”

Excessively mortified by this address, and fearful of incurring more of the same sort, Bartley turned again to the carriage, and, shrugging his shoulders, and laying his hand upon the door, doubtless to shew that “on that hand there was a glove,” he began again—“Indeed, leedies, it is my duty to expound unto you, that the rude, unmannerly thrick this poor ignorant crachur done was not from malice prepense, but a poor piece of ignorant, superstitious craft, to keep worse off the young lady, and I am fearful is not actionable.” Seeing that he had not made himself understood, and that Miss Wilton, with very little ceremony, was about to say so, he leaned closer towards them, and looking knowingly from one to the other, he whispered, “*It’s in regard of the fairies, ladies!*” It need scarcely be said this did not throw much light upon the subject; and Miss Wilton, at last yielding to Lady Rosa’s entreaties that they might proceed, on condition that she would induce Lord Lisbrian to take up the matter, requested of Mr. Bartley to prevail on the men to let them do so.

Only too happy to be permitted to commence their willing labour, the horses having been already removed, as many of the stout peasantry as could get near the carriage lent a hand ; and the victims, knowing by this time how vain all remonstrance would be, quietly submitted to be drawn to Lisbrian Castle.

It was quite dusk by the time they arrived, so that they were able to distinguish little more than an extensive demesne on each side of the approach, and presently a very large, massive, but gloomy looking building, which was announced to them as the mansion house, by the stopping of the carriage, and several voices at once bidding them “ Heartily welcome to the cashel ! ”

Lord Lisbrian’s carriage being still at the door, theirs was set down a few paces from it ; but they were so anxious to make their escape, that even Susan joined her voice to the general petition to be let out at once, and suffered to walk to the house. To this, however, a positive refusal was given.

“ No, no ! Divil a so much as the sole of her ladyship’s shoe should touch the ground that blessed night, barring the carpet, nor her friends, for her sake.”

“ But I’ll tell you what we’ll do with you, my lady,” one of the men said. “ As yeez don’t like to be dhrawn agin,—and, in throth, its no wondher, for some o’ thim didn’t dhraw a bit too studdy,

nor shall niver be coach-horses to me,—but as I was saying, mee lady,” he continued, when the laugh occasioned by this brilliant sally had subsided, “we’ll just make a sate for you, and whip you in in no time. Here, Mick Loughran! Shawn Hough! Shamus Doolan!” he called, selecting them with the air of a man who knew the value of his temporary patronage; and before Lady Rosa could make any answer, or, indeed, had understood what was intended, four stout men had clasped their hands on each other’s wrists, forming what is called “my lady’s chair,” and, with the utmost simplicity and earnestness, requested her to take her seat thereon.

Lady Rosa looked anxiously around for her father or brother to protect her from this fresh attack, but they were not to be seen amongst the crowd; and as Mr. Bartley had never relinquished his post of honour by the side of the carriage, though not opening his lips again for fear of marring the conquest he believed he had made, Miss Wilton once more appealed to him for protection. Elated now entirely beyond himself, no sooner did he understand that they wished to be spared the honour intended them, than pushing the self-fettered men aside, “A stand back! stand back, you unmannerly, ignorant clowns!” he exclaimed. “Diz yeez think she’s goin’ to sile her iligant silk gownd upon your dirty, grasy sleeves?”

The men, perfectly alive to the force, if not to the refinement, of this remonstrance, fell back abashed; and Lady Rosa participated so far in their feelings that she asked herself whether she would not rather have accepted the seat than have such a reason assigned for declining it. She had not much time, however, to debate the point, when, to her infinite delight, she perceived her father and brother making their way towards her as fast as they were able, from the pressure of a crowd which surrounded, and gazed on, and examined them, more as creatures of a different species than of a different class from themselves. For the ladies, however, they made way; and Lady Rosa, seizing her father's arm, while Hubert offered his to the Miss Wiltons, not a single word was uttered, until, having hastily passed through the massive, open door, and magnificent, oak-lined hall, they turned into the first apartment that presented itself, without having encountered a living being in the house; and then, as if after a long lapse of years, each gazed upon the other to see what impressions they had received in the meantime, and to congratulate themselves for having met once more.

CHAPTER XIX.

DIFFERENT, however, had the impressions made by the same circumstances upon the members of the same party been. Upon the idle banker, the London citizen, the *unnaturalized* Englishman, a reception so enthusiastic, so warm-hearted, so flattering as he felt it to be, from the tenantry over whom he was called on to preside, acted like a spell that suddenly unbound whatever sober English habits, birth, education, and circumstances had forced upon him, and suffered his naturally jovial, thoughtless Irish temperament to burst forth with all the force of re-action. He laughed, he shouted, he rubbed his hands; and, wholly unconscious that there could be a difference of feeling or opinion upon the occasion, he rapturously kissed his daughter, shook hands with the Miss Wiltons, forgetting at the moment

that he had ever felt displeasure against any one in his life, and, in perfect sincerity, exclaimed—

“ Well, after all, what life is to be compared to that of the landlord of humble, grateful, warm-hearted tenantry? and what else should a man at my time of life think of but making them happy? Well, I really do at last believe that all things happen for the best, especially when a man is blessed with such dear children as I have! D— me, but I despise myself this moment for thinking of anything else.” And again he held out a hand to his son and daughter; when, as if recollecting he was becoming rather too personal, as a sort of amende, he turned to Susan, and asked her if anything could be more delightful than their reception. “ I saw you in their hands!” he said, exultingly, “ as we passed by, and Hubert wanted to go to see that you were not frightened; but I laughed him out of that. Dear, delightful people that they are! what a shame it is the way they are maligned! Rosa, I hope you have at last got over your ridiculous prejudices; for if this evening has not cured you, you are really incorrigible. Don’t you think so, Miss Susan Wilton? Do you not agree with me, that through all that odd accent, and—and—queer appearance, they have natural politeness, even to refinement?”

But receiving no answer, “ Why, you are all as cold and unmoved as if seated in Belgrave Square!”

he exclaimed, at last, feeling the want of some sympathy; and then looking inquiringly from one to the other, he said, rather bitterly, "I detest this English phlegm, that nothing can make the least impression on;" and he was turning away in great disgust, when Lady Rosa, hastening to Susan's assistance, while Miss Wilton was eagerly relating their adventures to Hubert, said—

"Oh, papa, you must not appeal to poor Susan on these points; she has not been at all so civilly received as you suppose; and we have all been greatly frightened," and she related what had happened.

Lord Lisbrian first stood aghast, and said the woman should certainly be punished; but presently hearing Hubert mention that the same superstition had existed amongst the polished Romans, he began to recall to his mind having heard of its being prevalent in Ireland; and his short-lived anger vanishing in a sort of glee at this fresh trait of nationality, he undertook not only to defend it, but to prove their politeness from it. But as, in doing so, he cast his eyes on the pale, pensive, dignified face that had been subjected to the process, the exuberance of his spirits suddenly and totally overcame him; and vainly endeavouring to finish a speech commencing with, "I think they are—I think they are—the most—the most——" he burst into peals of laughter, so long, so loud, and so heartfelt, that,

in spite of all efforts to the contrary, one by one, every person in the room, except the victim herself, became infected, and the shouts and shrieks of laughter, escaping through the unclosed window, were caught by the mob without, and as if it were decreed that poor languid Susan was ever to be the instigator of the national shout, once more the air was rent with acclamations that frightened the rooks from their slumbers, and procured their assistance to the chorus.

What the young lady's feelings were in the meantime, may more readily be imagined than described—if, indeed, any one was ever in such a predicament before ; but whatever they were, she knew that to give utterance to them at that moment would only increase the merriment, and, accordingly, rising in perfect silence from her seat, and crossing the room with a slow and majestic movement, she opened the door to proceed—she knew not whither ; when, starting back with a piercing shriek of mingled terror and distraction, she fled towards her sister, and gave to view, standing perfectly still on the threshold of the door, a slight, or rather a thin, low-sized man, deeply pitted with the small-pox—his dress, a short, square-cut, green riding-frock, buff waistcoat, crimson cotton neck-handkerchief, leather small-clothes, top-boots, spurs, and—horsewhip, might have bespoken him either the sportsman or the bravo of other days.

Lord Lisbrian's mirth at once subsiding at this most equivocal appearance, in a cold and haughty tone he demanded to know to what he was to impute it ; but the man remained perfectly still and silent, as if rooted to the spot. "Why, this is really most extraordinary !" exclaimed Lord Lisbrian, turning to his son. "And, now I think of it, where can all the people belonging to the house be ? We have not seen a servant yet ! I expected the agent would have been here to receive us, and prevent our being subjected to such annoyances as this ; it does not look well for his superior activity and intelligence !" and on hearing a sort of groan from the door, he again turned to the man with irritation, and said, "Be so good, Sir, as to make known your business, or to withdraw ! we wish to shut the door ;" and advancing close to him for the purpose, he also almost started back a pace or two as he recognised in him the person whose strange evolutions had excited their suspicions upon the road ; and although there was nothing either in the scene, the circumstances, or the man's appearance now, to confirm those suspicions, the impression was not to be at once effaced ; so after another stern, scrutinizing glance, Lord Lisbrian demanded whether he were not the person who had so much alarmed the ladies by pursuing their carriage on the road. Another hollow groan, while the drops of moisture

started out upon his brow, seemed to give assent to this.

“And pray, may I inquire,” continued Lord Lisbrian, “what your intentions then were, since you will not tell what they are now?” After the lapse of a few seconds, during which his lips were seen to move inaudibly, he gasped out in the usual atrocious brogue,

“I thought, my Lord, you were alone!”

“Oh, so!” exclaimed Lord Lisbrian. “And your plans were disconcerted on seeing so many of us?”

“They were, my Lord;” and he seemed about to burst into tears.

“What *can* be the meaning of this?” said Lord Lisbrian, turning to his son once more; “or what should we do with this fellow? Pray, my good friend,” he said, returning to him, “can you inform me where any of the servants are? or where the agent is? I wrote to request he would meet me here, arrived as I am, an utter stranger. Is he sick or dead, that he has not thought proper to obey me?”

“I wish he was!” were the words that became audible, uttered in heartfelt accents.

“Oh, hoh! that’s your business, is it? You have some fault to find with him?” exclaimed Lord Lisbrian, suddenly, in all the consciousness of new landlordship. “But it’s rather too soon to begin,

my good fellow. I have the highest possible opinion of Mr. Tracey in every respect, from the number of years he was agent to my late uncle, and the confidence he had in him. I depend entirely upon him for everything, and should scarcely have ventured here otherwise, so unprepared as I am. What do you stand there groaning for? I will not hear a word against him until I have seen and conversed with him; and I must beg to assure you, my good Sir, that my opinion of you, from the two occasions on which you have made your appearance before us, is not the most favourable; first, as a highwayman; and next, listening at my door! However, I don't want to have anything more to do with you till I inquire further; and the best amends you can make me is to send for the agent immediately, if he is anywhere within reach." And he was making another attempt to shut the door, when the unfortunate man put out his hand to prevent it, writhed for a moment in fearful contortions, and then brought out the words "My Lord, my Lord! sure, sure *I am the agent!*"

If Lord Lisbrian did not wholly start before, there could be no doubt that he did now; but it seemed as much with anger as surprise; and he was again going to push the man out of the room, when a whispering voice from some recess in the darkness without was heard calling, "Misther Thracey—Misther Thracey! come here one minute! you're

wantin', Sir !" Lord Lisbrian being close, also caught the words ; and now, in still more unpleasant astonishment, he exclaimed, " Can this be possible ? Are you indeed, Sir, Mr. Tracey, my uncle's agent and confidential friend ? " and there was more conveyed in the tone in which these words were uttered than Lord Lisbrian, with all his thoughtlessness, would willingly have expressed. The unfortunate man only wiped his brow with a handkerchief, the duplicate of that he wore round his neck. Lord Lisbrian repeated the question in nearly similar words.

" Indeed, indeed, my Lord, I'm all that's for it !" he replied at last, with the most doleful seriousness.

There was a moment's pause, whilst every one, even the ladies, looked upon each other ; and then, with what he considered a heroic effort, Lord Lisbrian said, " Walk in, then, Sir ; pray walk in, Mr. Tracey ; and—and sit down, Sir !" and he threw himself into a chair for the first time. The unfortunate Tracey obeyed him so far as to advance a few paces into the room, but there he stopped, until finding himself the only person standing, he cast the most imploring though furtive glances round and round him, as if by secret intelligence, beseeching one of the chairs to take pity on him and advance. Hubert, seeing his predicament, placed one behind him, on the edge of which

he sat down, crossing his hands upon his lap, while the horsewhip was seen to vibrate with a most tremulous motion, and fixed his eyes upon the carpet.

“Well, Sir,” Lord Lisbrian began, with a deep sigh; “here we are, you see, arrived!”

“You are heartily welcome, my Lord.”

“Yes, Sir; yes—thank you; but how are we to proceed? what are we to do next?”

“My Lord?”

“I mean, in short, my good friend,” Lord Lisbrian rapidly, and somewhat impatiently exclaimed, “that if you are really the—the only agent, I must put myself completely into your hands, for we are perfect Goths and Vandals here, or like creatures fallen from another planet. You understand me?”

“Oh, no, my Lord, I do not.”

“Heaven and earth! what are we to do, Hubert?”

“Have patience, my dear father,” Hubert whispered; “this poor man is evidently struggling against a nervous paroxysm of timidity; and if you confound or frighten him too much, I should not wonder if he fainted.”

“That *would* be a pleasant consummation!” Lord Lisbrian exclaimed, in evident terror; and then, by way of re-assuring the man, he turned to him suddenly, and said, “Mr. Tracey, allow me to introduce you; these are my son and daughter and the Miss Wiltons.” Tracey was a particu-

larly supple, active man, and never, in the course of his life before, perhaps, had wished anything so much as, at that moment, to rise off his chair, but he found it impossible, and only bent his head as a monarch might have done. Hubert now went over and placed himself between him and his father. At his approach, the horsewhip began to vibrate as violently as if about to be applied to his shoulders; but not apprehending this, in a low, gentle, soothing voice, he said, "Mr. Tracey, we are perfectly aware that our accents must sound strange to you; but—"

"Oh, they do, Sir, very!"

"Yes, of course they must; it is always the case when people have lived all their lives in different countries; but it soon wears off, you will find," he said, smiling. "We shall soon understand each other."

"I hope so, Sir!" with a sigh of despair.

"Nay, I am certain of it. And now let us try so far as by my asking if there are not any servants here?"

"Oh Lord! Sir, what do you mane at all?" he exclaimed; and, in his terror, actually looked into Hubert's face. Hubert was nearly disheartened. However, with admirable perseverance, he smiled, and repeated his question still more slowly and distinctly.

"Oh, by dad! Sir, didn't my Lord bid me keep them all on, men and women, as they were?"

“ Yes, yes ; and why, pray, did you not do so ? ” interposed Lord Lisbrian, drawing Hubert a little aside, in order to share in the phenomenon.

“ Sure, my Lord, I did.”

“ Oh, you did, did you ? and where are they, pray ? for we might have died for want of one since we arrived ! ”

“ They went to welcome you home, my Lord.”

Lord Lisbrian laughed at this Irish mode of welcome ; but as it recalled the tenantry to his mind, he asked Mr. Tracey what he ought to do in acknowledgment of their devotion.

“ Oh, nothing at all, my Lord,” was the first answer. But this being set aside, Hubert suggested sending out to invite them to a dinner on some particular day. To this Lord Lisbrian rather objected, on account of the delay. “ Strangers as we are here ourselves,” he said, “ it will be so long before we know how to manage anything, and—and—hem ! ”

“ But now, Mr. Tracey, suppose we were to think of this dinner,” interrupted Hubert, coming to the rescue ; “ what steps ought we to take ? ”

“ A not a step at all, Sir, but to the pasture or the cowhouse, according as you’d give them beef or mutton,” was the brisk reply. Hubert himself was now nearly upset ; and as no one was able at the moment to utter a word, Tracey was beginning to feel himself in his own element ; and anxious to make

amends for passed deficiencies, touched Hubert on the elbow, who leaning towards him in obedience to his beckoning sign, he went on in a confidential whisper—"I'll tell you what I'm thinkin', Sir; there's an owl there abroad in the yard fattenin' these six months, and divil a bit of flesh she'll put up. Now, my advice id be to give her to them bodily, to make ducks and dhrakes of! It'll be the chapest way in the end, you'll see!"

Again Lord Lisbrian, observing Hubert's risible contortions returning, became impatient at being excluded, and, on being informed of the suggestion, once more drew him from between him and Mr. Tracey, and said, "Mr. Tracey, I positively insist that whatever is done may be done handsomely. My own idea is, to give them money on the spot; and if you have enough about you—I mean some handsome sum—I really wish you would do so. However, you *ought* to be the best judge, and if you think they will like the dinner better——"

"Oh they will—hem! they will, my Lord!" he said; and was hastening out to prevent any further discussion, when Lord Lisbrian, calling after him, "And tell them they shall have plenty of good ale to drink our healths"—he stopped short, and looked appealingly to Hubert. Hubert did not understand the appeal, and so he was obliged to say—

"Better say nothing about the *sort* of dhrink,

my Lord, just now, and maybe before then you'll think better of it," and he disappeared.

"What upon earth is to become of us, Hubert?" Lord Lisbrian instantly exclaimed. "Do you quite believe that this creature has for years been my uncle's agent? One good thing will come out of the evil, however; be he protestant or papist, we can make him do what we like about the election." And the ladies also gathered round Hubert, as if sharing in the consternation.

"I am not so sure of that," Hubert answered. "I don't think he is altogether the automaton you take him for, Sir."

"*I take him for an automaton!*" exclaimed Lord Lisbrian. "No; I pay him no such compliment. An automaton is generally made at least to represent intellect; but this is evidently a poor besotted creature, whose intellects and principles, if he ever had any, have alike been soaked away; and I still think he was about no good purpose on the road; indeed, he owned as much himself; so do not seek to deprive me of my only consolation, in believing I shall find him a useful tool in my hands."

"Well, Sir," said Hubert, smiling, "I will not, as you make it a request; but, remember, excessive timidity has before now assumed the form of both folly and vice."

"Well, we shall see." And just then Tracey

returned, apparently bearing with him the departing huzza of the multitude, which at that moment filled the apartment. Lord Lisbrian then inquired if any provision had been made for their own dinner ; on which Tracey cast down his eyes and said, with marked emphasis,

“ For *yours*, my Lord, there is.”

“ And will you not allow the ladies any ?”

“ We thought you were coming alone, my Lord.”

“ Is it possible I was so heedless as not to mention any one else ? Well, come, we must only make the best of it ; I suppose we can have rashers, or eggs, or some such thing ? But this,” casting his eyes round the long, narrow, and still oak-lined room in which they sat,—“ this looks like the dining-room, and I see no preparations. How is that ? for I assure you we are all very hungry.”

“ My Lord, the servants went to welcome you.”

“ Oh ! well, pray let them shew the sincerity of their welcome now, by giving us food ; and Rosa, my love, if I really have been so heedless as not to have led them to expect you and your friends, perhaps you ought to see the housekeeper about the beds. Mr. Tracey, we shall follow you up stairs, or wherever the drawing-room is, if you will lead the way.”

With much difficulty, Tracey was prevailed on to go first ; for the Irish of a certain class are particularly ceremonious. At last, however, he led

the way through the same magnificent hall, under a Gothic archway of carved oak, and up a short but noble staircase, divided into two by a balustrade, carved to correspond with the archway, and terminating in a corridor, from which, opposite to either flight, opened two doors into the drawing-room. The first sensation every person present experienced was that of unmixed, almost awful, admiration as they contemplated that apartment, beautiful alike in size, proportion, and decoration. The furniture, indeed, was faded and gone; but the eye refused to rest on it while there was that fretted dome and that admirable sculpture to engage it; and, besides, a summer moon, struggling through crested windows, and the light of a single candle which Tracey held in his hand, were alike "favourable unto wearing apparel." The whole party paused at the entrance to indulge themselves in contemplating it; and at last Lord Lisbrian exclaimed, "Well; certainly the old fellow replaced the damage nobly;" and his daughter sighed at this dispersion of her visions of other days.

CHAPTER XX.

HAVING shewn the party into the drawing-room, Tracey left them, to send up lights and the ladies' maids ; and Lady Rosa, having, at her father's suggestion, despatched Boothe in search of the housekeeper, the person representing herself as such presently made her appearance in her chamber, dressed in a recent suit of mourning, which gave somewhat of a respectable appearance to her portly person.

“ Oh ! are you the housekeeper, pray ? ” Lady Rosa asked.

“ At your sarvice, my Lady, for want of betther,” the woman replied, dropping her lowest reverence.

Lady Rosa then proceeded to make some general inquiries into the state of the establishment, markets, facilities for procuring provision, &c. In the course of which examination it appeared, that

though the town of Lisbrian, which was about two miles from the castle, was supposed to contain from four to five thousand inhabitants, it retained little more than the name of a market-day, where the chief business transacted was some trifling exchanges between the very lowest classes, of the bare necessities of life ; and that it could by no means be relied on for a regular supply of anything beyond them. Lady Rosa inquired what the people did for meat.

“ Oh, why the most of the fam’lies that ett mate,” Mrs. Mulloy said, “ had pigs and fowls within themselves ; and there was one man killed a mutton now and agin, when the gentry promised not to lave it on his hands ; but to be sure, things would take a turn now.”

“ But they cannot turn lean sheep or cows into fat ones in a day,” Lady Rosa said, in some dismay. “ I trust there are some here ?”

“ Oh, plinty, plinty !” Mrs. Mulloy assured her.

“ And bread ? How are you supplied with bakers ?”

“ Whethen, Pat Hynes was as good a warrant to make bread as ever dipped hands in flour ; but the crathur hadn’t the manes to lay in what was wantin’, and so it wasn’t often as it should be ; but he had ruz a few shillin’s from Mистер Tracey on the sthrent of the Lord’s comin’, and there was as ilegant a batch below as ever tooth was set in.”

Lady Rosa asked if all the country parts of Ireland were in the same state.

“ Oh no,” she said ; “ they were not. There was the town of Still-Organ, about ten miles beyant, where everything was to be had like Dublin, in a manner, though it was not above half the size of Lisbrian.”

Lady Rosa asked to what its prosperity was attributed.

“ Whethen, I don’t know, mee Lady, unless that they look afther their poor tinnants so much, though they say they’re far from rich now—more’s the pity—and th’ oul man half mad with some lawsuit he lost ; that’s Lord Still-Organ, my lady, the father of the new young clergyman that’s come to this parish. And there’s another town, my Lady, very happy and comfortable, about fifteen or sixteen miles off, where I come from, my Lady, belongin’ to a widah lady too.”

“ Protestants still, of course ?”

“ Oh, St. Patrick save us, my Lady !” crossing herself. “ Is it my Lady Shannonview ?—*that would* be a sight to see ! Oh no, mee Lady, but a fine Catholic itself, and all belongin’ to her.”

“ And yet—but I beg your pardon—I wished to inquire about one or two other matters—the servants, for instance. What servants are there in the house ?”

“ Oh, my word, my Lady, I doubt if I could

count them at once that way ;” and holding up her fingers, and tapping them alternately, she began, “ There’s first and foremost, Pat Mooney, the butler, my oul Lord’s own fostherer that he took when the Frenchman died, and that was bred and born upon the place, and never was out of it ; and there’s the coachman, only he isn’t in it—he went to see his people and isn’t come back ; then there’s Pat, and James, and Joe, and the gardener, and the steward, and two or three gossoons and stable-men, and maybe, about as many more women, my Lady.”

“ But of what sort ? What are they, I mean ?”

“ Why, then, they’re some single, and some marri’d, as they happen to be, my Lady. There’s myself, your humble sarvint,” curtseying, “ a widah, plase your honour, nor never marri’d agin, though ’t isn’t but I might, indeed, my Lady, though *I* say it ; and there’s Mary Houlahan, she’s *never* married, nor like to be, I’m thinkin’, though *she* doesn’t think so ; and there’s Peggy Madden, her they call ‘ Peg o’ the Cashel,’ from bein’ so long in it—I’m thinkin’ she wont long have that story to tell, for she has a stockin’ full o’ money gathered already, and has plenty axin’ her on the head of it ; but they say—”

“ But it was of their various stations I wished to inquire,” interrupted Lady Rosa. “ However,

it is no matter at present. You have a cook, of course."

"Oh, I have, my Lady, by coorse—hem!"

"What country-man or woman?"

"Ouh! such as she is; she is an Irishwoman, plase your honour."

"What do you mean by such as she is?"

"Because it's ather myself or Peggy, my Lady."

"What do you mean?" Lady Rosa repeated.

"Why you see, my Lady, my Lord was a gentleman, and no way extrornary; and we didn't keep our separate places all out so particlar, but just did as we did." Lady Rosa sighed at the prospect of superintending this random sort of establishment; and seeing no use in prolonging the interview just then, she inquired about the beds.

"Oh, we have, my Lady, plenty," Mrs. Mulloy replied. "If there's one thing better than another in the cashel it's beds; and they're as dhry as bones, my Lady; for, indeed, I'd make the girls sleep on them if it was only to hear the prayers they offer up for the sowl of the man that left such iligant beds undher poor crathurs' sides!"*

Lady Rosa, though not exactly entering into the spirit of this answer, was fain to be content with it; and intimated to the woman that she

* Verbatim as it was said to the author in simple sincerity.

might now retire. She seemed, however, on her part, not to understand intimations, and stood still, her eyes wandering with a strange expression, alternately scrutinizing and covetous, between Lady Rosa and some of her travelling trunks, which lay, half-unpacked, in the room. Lady Rosa requested her to send her maid.

“I will, my Lady, I will,” she answered; but still made no attempt to move. Lady Rosa now began to feel alarmed, having gathered from words and signs in the course of their conversation that the woman was a Roman Catholic. She glanced round the room, but seeing no bell, and thinking with horror of the extent of the castle, even if there had been, she began to edge towards the door in the hope of making her escape. The woman perceived her intention, however, and stepping backwards towards it herself, evidently to prevent her, said, “I humbly ax your pardon, my Lady; but there’s just one little word I’d wish very much to say to you, if I might make so bould.” Relieved by this address, Lady Rosa encouraged her to speak. She fastened her eyes again on the open trunks; and then, in a low, confidential tone, said, “Whethen see, mee Lady, maybe it’s to your maid I ought to spake about such things; but jist not likin’ to expose the house at the first goin’ off, and, to be sure, why wouldn’t you have more feelin’ for it than another? Whethen it’s this, mee Lady, to see if you’d

be so kind, all out, as to lend me the loan of them sheets I see hingin' out of your boxes !" pointing, as she spoke, to the packing-sheets ;—and unconscious of the sensations which her language and manner excited in Lady Rosa, who was standing in silent alarm before her, the woman continued—
“ Do you think, would you ? for to tell you God's thruth, mee Lady, and as well as we're off for beds, and so ill are we for sheets !”

Lady Rosa now ventured to ask what she meant.

“ Why, you see, mee Lady, there's no great store in the house, and it's a great pull so many to be called for at once. There'll be a pair for your own bed, my Lady ; a pair for aitch of the young ladies, for Miss Boothe tould me they'd by no manes sleep together ; and then there's my Lord and your brither, and I'll engage your maid 'll be expecting a pair herself,—so you see, my Lady—may I slip them out ?” and she advanced to the trunks.

“ No, no, I say !” Lady Rosa exclaimed. “ Do not touch my dresses ! I really do not understand what you have been saying ?”

“ Oh, well, never heed it, my Lady ; it's no matter ! I'm sorry I mintioned it to you !” she said, in a tone half disappointed, half reproachful.

“ But did you say there are not sheets enough for the beds ?”

“ Oh, no, my Lady, I did not. It's no matter sure ; not that I'd have harmed your dhresses one

bit. I'd have jest slipped them up, purtily, be the sides, and you could lock your boxes for a day or two, and then tell your maid you gev them to a beggar. But, as I say," seeing she did not make the desired impression, "I've a shift of my own that 'll do a'most as well."

"What!" Lady Rosa exclaimed.

"Whethen, I'll tell you, my Lady. We're not at all so ill off for table-linen; and sure I can jest clap a pair of nice, clane table-cloths on the young gentleman and the French girl's bed, and who'll be the wiser? What do they know of Irish manifacthors?" and without waiting for an answer, she left the room, with a very low opinion of Lady Rosa's *esprit de corps*.

Lady Rosa, in the meantime, hastened back to the drawing-room, and communicated to her father what she had learned. In no less dismay he repeated it to Tracey, who, colouring as deeply as if detected in some deadly delinquency in his own department, muttered, "Oh! my word! that's too bad!" and left the room. Dinner was in the meantime announced, and Lord Lisbrian, being by this time ravenously hungry, thought himself so sublime, when, giving his arm to Miss Wilton, he was able, in allusion to Tracey's intimation of the frugal fare, to exclaim—

"And, though my portion is but scant,
I give it with good will,"

that his first sensation was an unpleasant one, not unlike that of making an unnecessary step in going up stairs, when he found a table, at which ten might have dined even with moderate ideas of comfort, groaning under every species of animal food that the season did or did not afford ; including a sucking-pig with an orange in its mouth, and that worst of all affectation of juvenility, hobbledehoy lamb !

The whole party paused in succession as this sight met their view ; and Lord Lisbrian, addressing the fosterer-butler, who stood glowing with pride at their evident astonishment, asked what it was all intended for.

“ For *your* dinner, my Lord,” was the self-satisfied reply.

“ For my dinner ! You mean for the tenants’ dinner ! How long, pray, did you intend I should be consuming this ?”

“ My word, I don’t know, my Lord !” the man replied, now beginning to think that all was not right ; “ but Mrs. Mulloy says the English are great eaters !”

After the sensation produced by this speech had subsided, Miss Wilton exclaimed, “ Come, come, good people, let us see whether we cannot keep up our characters !” and, as Gilmore, Hubert’s servant, had considerably offered his assistance, which Pat Mooney had graciously accepted, the first course was

got through with little more discomposure than that occasioned by the frequent laughs at the substantial preparations for one person's dinner, which so much scandalized Pat, that, when in one of his hurried flights to the lower regions for some sauce or spice forgotten, Mrs. Mulloy seized him to ask "how things were going on," he answered, "Oh! very well indeed, so far; only I'm afeard he's main stingy, for he does nothin' but fault the waste o' mate, and says devil a bit more the tinnants will get at their welcome-home dinner!" and as Mrs. Mulloy relinquished her hold of him to "bless herself" at such a hearing, he flew back to his post.

The second course, however, was still to be got through; and for this the merciless slaughter of game of every kind had been such that, for the first time, both father and son recollected the agent, and immediately inquired of the servants where he was. Gilmore seemed unable, and Pat unwilling, to answer. However, as dinner was concluded, and the ladies, pleading fatigue, rose to retire, Lord Lisbrian repeated his inquiry, and Pat then briskly acknowledging that he was in the house, he desired that he might be requested to walk in and have some wine.

"I am afraid indeed, Sir," Hubert said, "that we have been shamefully remiss already, in going to dinner without having invited him."

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Lord Lisbrian; "you

don't mean to say that I could invite such a creature as that to sit at table with your sister and her friends?"

Hubert cast down his eyes.

"Nay, say your say, Hubert," Lord Lisbrian said; "for if it is anything to that effect, it must be highly entertaining."

"Then, I must acknowledge, my dear father, that I think the person whom any man selects to represent himself, his principles, and feelings, in perhaps the most important and responsible of all situations, that of presiding over the interests of a numerous tenantry, should at least be worthy to associate with his family."

Lord Lisbrian laughed. "Then you think I should present Mr. Tracey at Almack's, and beg of him to dance with Rosa,—that is, if she should be so fortunate as to get there herself."

"No!" said Hubert, laughing also. "I do not think we have a right to intrude any person into general society, merely for being useful to ourselves; but not to treat him as a sort of family gentleman, *ami de maison*, is, I think, at once to pronounce him unworthy of the place he fills, and to prevent him from becoming so."

"Well done, Hubert! Why, you seem to have been studying more than your classics!"

"I have been almost forced to think a little on these subjects lately, through the letters of a friend

of mine who recently settled here as clergyman of this parish, and whose whole soul is wrapped up in them."

"Oh, that's young Rochford, Lord Still-Organ's son, that was always such a crony of yours. Is he indeed interested on those subjects? By-the-bye, they used to have great interest in the country, I believe. We must canvass them for Wilton. But about this Tracey? Even if it were as you say, the appointing of such a miserable wretch to the situation of a gentleman was none of my doing."

"But finding him in it, my dear father, I do not think you have any right to deprive him of its privileges, until he does anything to forfeit them, or is formally removed from it."

"But I think he has already done enough to forfeit them by his whole manner and appearance, and I'm perfectly convinced he is either knave or fool."

"And I am as firmly convinced he is neither; and moreover there is something about his dear little ugly face that I absolutely fancy."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, Hubert," Lord Lisbrian said, with sudden glee. "I'll bet you the finest riding horse I can procure in the country against that fellow Gilmore of yours, whom I covet excessively, that in one week he is expelled our society by universal consent, trusting implicitly to your honour."

“Done, done!” Hubert eagerly exclaimed, “provided you promise to treat the poor little man with consideration and kindness in the meantime, and especially in this coming interview, for first impressions are not easily effaced from a timid creature like him.”

“I will, upon my honour!” Lord Lisbrian replied. “And here he comes, this representative of myself!” And Tracey entered the room, looking pale and ill at ease as before.

“You have dined, of course, Mr. Tracey,” Lord Lisbrian said, “or we should have seen you at dinner?”

“Oh! I have, my Lord, I have, to be sure!” he answered, muttering “yesterday” to himself, as a salvo to his conscience.

“You can take some wine, however,” Lord Lisbrian continued; “it must have been so long since;” and with difficulty extracting from him that he preferred port, he himself filled his glass, and went on, “I am sorry you did not favour us with your company still; but, indeed, the odour of dinner, such a one as we had, at least, could not be very pleasant to any one not partaking of it.”

“It’s in it still,” was the reply, in low and melancholy accents.

“Not offensively, I hope?” Lord Lisbrian said, rather surprised, however, at this apparent fastidiousness.

“ Oh, not at all, my Lord, not at all ; but quite the contrary,” he answered, snuffing it up with eager sincerity, but becoming every instant paler and paler. Again they pushed the wine to him ; but beginning now to feel himself seriously discomposed,—or, as he afterwards expressed it, “ quare,”—without exactly knowing to what to attribute it, he pushed the bottle nervously from him, crying out in piteous accents, “ Oh, no more, Sir ! no more, my Lord, for God’s sake !”

“ Nonsense, man !” exclaimed Lord Lisbrian, seeing his agitation, and attributing it, as well as his refusal, to *mauvaise honte*. “ Nonsense ! I know that much, at least, of your Irish customs, that you can take your glass like men, and only require to be pressed to do so. Come, fill a bumper, and drink us a welcome home !”

Had the unfortunate man believed the glass to contain Prussic acid, he would not have felt himself at liberty to decline this toast, and accordingly he drank it off. To his astonishment, the dizziness presently seemed to subside, and to be succeeded by most agreeable sensations. His courage rose in proportion, and when the bottle came round again he required no pressing, but helped himself freely, only giving as he did so a most knowing leer to Lord Lisbrian and his son, as if claiming their approbation.

Not happening to observe him at the moment,

Lord Lisbrian said, "So you tell me, my predecessor was very particular about the game, Mr. Tracey?"

Tracey looked puzzled for a moment, then briskly answered, "Oh, he was, Sir, entirely; divil a better hand you ever seen at it, except Mrs. Kelly; indeed she bate us both fairly."

"What! at shooting?"

"Shooting, my Lord? who said shooting? *I* didn't, *I'm* sure,—did I now, Misther Hubert? You that's from Oxford College ought to know,—did I now? Do justice, fair play even between your papa and me? Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Lisbrian and his son now stared upon each other—that two or three glasses of port wine could have intoxicated any one, especially a man of Tracey's station in Ireland, they believed to be an utter impossibility, and they had seen him only too sober scarcely an hour before. He observed the look they cast on each other; and turning his head rapidly from one to the other with an inquiring drunken countenance, he said, "Ah, what are ye looking at? Now, I know the manin' of that—*you*—" shaking his finger at Hubert,—"*you're* afraid of the father to tell the truth!" And he winked a hideously knowing wink at him. "But do you play whist yourself, my Lord? Who knows but you'd like a game, eh? Does Lady Rosa play? I'll engage she

doesn't though ; she's too handsome for that. Handsome girls thinks their faces are too much hid behind cards,—they might as well take the veil at once, that's what I tell them. Ha, ha, ha !—Why, my God, what's the matter ? Am I saying anythin' quare, that naither of yeez will spake, nor answer me ? Well, fill your glasses ; I'll give ye a toast will rouse ye—ye made me drink one just now, maybe one too much, for all I can tell now, so ye'll drink one for my biddin' ; Here's to Lady Rosa L'Estrange, and a purtier girl never came out of England, and may she never go back to it !”

And he stretched his hand again for the bottle ; but Hubert, now in uncontrollable disgust, snatched it out of his reach, and, ringing the bell with violence, as soon as the servant appeared, Lord Lisbrian said, “ You had better conduct this person to wherever he is to pass the night ; he seems in some extraordinary state, either of madness or drunkenness.”

The unfortunate Tracey, though too much intoxicated to follow the exact meaning of what Lord Lisbrian rapidly uttered, was yet not so far gone as not to be struck with the look, tone, and manner, which accompanied it, and with the bottle having been snatched almost out of his hand. The words, “ madness” and “ drunkenness” fell distinctly upon his ear, and in an instant turning as pale as death itself, as the servant in the utmost dismay

and astonishment approached him, he clasped his hands together, and in hollow and piteous accents exclaimed, "My God! Pat, is it possible I am drunk!"

"Gilmore is yours, Sir!" was Hubert's observation, as Pat Mooney supported Tracey from the room. "May I have his services till I can procure another?"

"No, no; we'll have the week's fair trial, fairly," Lord Lisbrian exclaimed, in a state of great triumph and glee, anticipating a great deal of fun from Hubert's repeated mortifications, and in this state of good understanding they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN these romance-contemning days, when people seek for acquaintances rather than adventures in novels, and feel a mystery an insult, it is something to be able to afford even a surprise. In one week, from the day with which the last chapter concluded, Hubert L'Estrange was in possession of one of the handsomest horses that could be found; and Michael Tracey was become so great a favourite at Lisbrian Castle, that if any accidental circumstance prevented his dining there, the ladies drooped, and Lord Lisbrian himself said, it was "very odd." But now, having, we trust, given the surprise, we shall, doubtless, be called on to explain. The morning after the mortification his pretensions to penetration had received, Hubert was awakened by somebody opening his door softly,

and creeping into his room. On calling out to know who it was, a voice whispered at his bedside the satisfactory reply, "It's me, Sir, plase your honour!"

"Who is me? and what do you want? It seems to be scarcely day."

"Ouh! it is, and a fine day itself, plase your honour; and, it's what brought me up; there's one below brought this, in great haste, from Still-Organ Abbey."

"What is it?"

"A letther, Sir!—a letther, to be sure. What else id bring me up? May I open the windy, your honour?"

"Why, if there was any necessity for wakening me there must be the same for opening the window; but who are you, all this time? and where's my own man?" and a sudden, and disagreeable recollection came over him, as he asked the last question, that Gilmore would not long be his. The windows were cautiously, but fully opened, and then opening the bed-curtains, and standing full in his view, the person answered, "I'm Pat Mooney, plase your honour; and I stole up a' purpose before Misther Gilmore was to come, the way you'd have this read, and say your mind upon it." Hubert now opened the letter in some surprise. It contained two enclosures; one was a little note, the contents of which were,

“MY DEAR HUBERT,—I know that from me to you it will be sufficient to say that the bearer, Mr. Tracey, the agent of the late Lord Lisbrian, is one of the best principled, most devoted, and single-minded persons I have ever met with. Of his qualifications as an agent I will not, and of his manners I need not speak; but you may believe me, that however appearances may have been against him last night, he is perfectly respectable and trustworthy; and of this I think you would be convinced by hearing him account for those appearances. I need not say what pleasure your arrival in this country gives me, and I shall pay my respects at Lisbrian Castle as soon as I can leave my father, who has been ill, but is better.

“Yours, sincerely,

“GERALD ROCHFORD.”

“Still-Organ Abbey, Friday.”

The other letter contained was from Tracey himself, and was as follows:—

“SIR,—You will doubtless wonder at my presumption in daring to address you, or indeed in being alive at all, after what befell me last night, of all nights in the year; but I only take the liberty of doing so in order to assure you that I have no motive in life in sending you the enclosed, but to shew you I am not the wretch you have good right to think me from all you have seen of

me. Sir, I did not dare to address myself to my lord ; but as you had the great kindness and condescension, which surely I'll never forget, to comfort and encourage me yesterday, I hope you will excuse this trouble from, Sir,

“ Your humble and obedient servant,

“ MICHAEL TRACEY.”

“ P.S.—SIR, I would not presume to present myself before you again, even in a letter, but only in regard of the state the house is in, which I never knew till I seen you all in it ; and that if I could be of the smallest use till the bells were righted, or anything, the wind of a word would find me waiting your orders ; and whether or not, there's one request I cannot help making bold to ask, if I died for it, that you and my Lord, would have the mercy on me not to tell the ladies the misfortune that happened to me, only to say I was too unmannerly to be let in again, or anything but the truth !”

Hubert's good nature, as well as other feelings, made him sincerely rejoice in these testimonials from a friend whose judgment and veracity he knew to be alike unimpeachable ; and who, though but recently come to preside over these people himself, had the experience of his ancestors from untraceable generations to guide him ; and whose own earlier years, when some impressions are true as

instincts, were spent amongst them. Hubert immediately inquired if Mr. Tracey was in the house.

"He is, Sir; sure he is," Pat answered, still in a sort of confidential whisper. "Sure it was himself went every toe to Still-Organ Abbey last night, Sir, and brought back the answer."

"Last night! He was surely in no state to go last night."

"Oh, it's he that was in a state to go anywhere, plase your honour! In two minutes he was as sober as a judge, the crathur! There's nothin' like a fright for that! and surely, surely, he got it last night, if ever man or mortal got it, whatever happened to him at all at all; but to my dyin' day, I'll never b'lieve but it was a bad eye he got in the crowd; for indeed, Sir, there was one goin'."

"Then, he is not in the habit of drinking?" Hubert could not resist saying.

"Is it he, Sir? No, but 'tisin't to say he's sober himself, and too sober,—for fair or market, wedding, wake, or christenin', never seen him otherwise,—but that's not enough, but he wants to make others as sober as himself, and brought down from Dublin, one time he went on business for my oul Lord, a fine speech, preached by some great gentleman out of a Tundish,* for an example, I suppose—sayin', that every bruise and scratch every one of us got was owin' to the whishkey, one way or

* Doubtless, our friend Pat meant in the Rotunda.

other, and wantin' us all to join some new religion, called timperince, that, they say, cures dhrinkin'."

"Well, and did many of the people join it?"

"Oh no, Sir, they did not; some one told us it was like Turks never to dhrink anything but wather—Lord save us! and so we just stud as we wor; betther be Christians at any rate, whatever sort we'd be!"

"Be so good as to say to Mr. Tracey that I shall be happy to see him the moment I am dressed, and pray send Gilmore immediately."

"Ah, Sir!" Pat pleadingly remonstrated, "and couldn't you have the great kindness to see him now, before any one's up? for, as sure as day, if you don't, something will give it wind, and the poor crathur's heart brakin' all the time!"

"Did he desire you to say he wished to come up now?"

"O! not he, Sir. He's as proud as Lucifer in his own little dacent way, though as humble as a cat in others. Nor don't, God bless you, Sir, tell him I said a word in his favour, for it would stomach him greatly ather to want it or get it from the likes of me; but still I think, and I know, he couldn't but wish to have it over."

"You may tell him, then, that if he will excuse the liberty, I shall be happy to see him immediately."

"I will, then, with a heart and a half; and God

bless you, Sir !” and Pat hastened away on his glad mission. But as poor Tracey’s agitation, confusion, and shamefacedness made his tale doubly tedious, we shall endeavour to give the outline more briefly.

Not having been informed that Lord Lisbrian intended performing the journey from Dublin to Lisbrian in one day, the tenantry had collected at an early hour to receive him. And although the good feeling of Tracey having pointed out to him the indelicacy there would be in uttering shouts of congratulation to the nephew, on inheriting the property of his uncle and cousin under such melancholy auspices, he had succeeded in obtaining their promises to omit it, the seeming attack he had himself made upon the party was at least the twentieth time he had ridden forward to prepare Lord Lisbrian for the crowds he was to meet. This object was frustrated, in the first instance, by the apparition of a carriage, full of ladies; and when, ashamed of himself, he returned a second time to the charge, he assured Hubert he thought he should have succeeded, had he not seen “one lady’s head peepin’ out watchin’ him.” He then gave up the attempt, and followed merely to be ready to offer his services at the castle; here, also, however, his evil genius presided. Arrived at the door, and carefully retaining his whip, as some occupation for his hands, he believed he really

should have entered at once, he said, had not the shouts of laughter within suddenly inspired him with the horrible idea that they had heard of his fruitless wanderings on the road, and were now amusing themselves at his expense, (how they do mistake who confound this agony of identity with vanity!) At this moment, Miss Susan Wilton opened the door, and, as he himself expressed it, "he was done for!"

When Lord Lisbrian informed him of Mrs. Mulloy's atrocious designs upon the table-cloths he left the drawing-room, not sorry, if the truth must be told, for the opportunity of thus escaping from a fresh agony that had beset him, in the form of uncertainty as to whether or not he was expected to join the company at dinner, and only waiting to utter a horrified remonstrance to Mrs. Mulloy as he passed, he fled to the stables, and taking (by long prescriptive right) a fresh horse, galloped off to his own home, distant about three miles, and himself brought back the necessary quantity of linen. When he returned, he found that dinner was, as he had calculated, over. But however his moral man might rejoice in having escaped that ordeal, there were, by this time, rebellious promptings of the physical, which made him full gladly accept Mrs. Mulloy's grateful offer of "taking a mouthful," seeing he had not done so since a very early hour on that busy day. Just as he had

raised the fork to his lips, however, Pat Mooney came down with the report that the Lord was inquiring for him; and when Mrs. Mulloy would have pressed him to remain, "Betther not," Pat Mooney observed, "for he's been callin' out for him this half-hour, and I baffled him till he was back with the sheets; but, faith, I can't do it again, for I owned he was in the house; and I'm doubtin', be what I see, it wouldn't pacify him to tell him he was atin' below!"

"Lord bless us! what a nagur!" ejaculated Mrs. Mulloy; and as poor Tracey laid down the untasted morsel, saying, with a very faint smile, "many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," she turned to a cupboard, and mixing a draught in a goblet kept for her own particular use, seized him stoutly by the arm, as he was departing, exclaiming, "The divil a slip betune this and your poor lip, anyhow!—and that's poethry, too, I believe;" and assuring him it was "only something to keep the wind out of his stomach," the part of Adam and Eve was acted over again. The consequence has been already mentioned. But when, in his own extraordinary language, he laid open every feeling to Hubert, with an unconscious vividness and earnestness which, even without Mr. Rochford's letter, must have brought conviction, and, not without tears, spoke of his own degradation, Hubert not only consoled him, but undertook to

promise for his father's secrecy—a promise, however, which he had no small difficulty in prevailing on Lord Lisbrian to redeem. “It was too hard,” he pleaded, “to lose both his jest and his bet, as he now plainly saw he should.” “Better, Sir, than to lose a friend,” Hubert answered; and Lord Lisbrian thought of the election, and acquiesced.

CHAPTER XXII.

AND now it is not our intention to inflict upon the reader any further instances of the petty but unceasing annoyances to which Lord Lisbrian and his family were subjected, by his rash determination to dispense with all attendance but such as the establishment of his predecessor could furnish. The old man had returned to his native country a wreck as complete as his own castle, but with this difference, that while the one was undergoing the process of effectual repair, the other was hastening to inevitable decay; and when such portion of the revenue of the extensive but long-neglected estates of the Lords of Lisbrian as had not been consumed in foreign lands was utterly swallowed up in his magnificent but most improvident undertaking to rebuild the castle on its ancient plan,—the estimated expense being doubled by the enhanced cost of

some of the materials,—it was fortunate for him, perhaps, that his moral powers kept such equal pace with the physical in their decline, as enabled him by the time it was finished to dispense, not only with the luxuries, but almost with the decencies of life, without murmurs, or, as many said, without consciousness.

His wife had died in giving birth to his son; and his mind, already weakened, was so subdued by that catastrophe, that it is probable, had the rebuilding of the castle not already been in progress, it never would have been undertaken. As it was, he seemed deprived of the energy necessary to countermand it, and it rose in splendour under the superintendence of the expensive English architect, who was very well satisfied to accept for his indemnification, a mortgage on the property at the very highest legal interest. The old man loved his infant son, but it was with the fondness of dotage. To see his childhood amused and his boyhood happy were his highest aims; and to both these Tracey ministered so effectually, while he procured, as he could, such sums as were absolutely necessary to support the nobleman, even in his own humble way, that he became as necessary to his existence almost as the child itself; a species of bond which, on Tracey's part, was ratified by the most sincere and devoted attachment that good offices performed ever yet kindled up

in a heart so purely benevolent as to be grateful for the happiness it has felt in conferring.

Indeed, except an occasional evening devoted (as Tracey in his drunkenness had owned) by Mr. and Mrs. Kelly to amusing the poor old gentleman at a sort of child's whist, and for which they also, with something of Tracey's own single-mindedness, felt affection, if not gratitude, towards him whom they obliged,—Tracey was latterly not only almost his sole companion, but sole attendant; and although the train of domestics which Mrs. Mulloy had, with some difficulty, enumerated, still hung on, eating, drinking, and sleeping, and running up arrears of wages, the old man had fallen into that state of imbecility that, without energy to part with them, he hated encountering them in any occupation, however necessary, about himself; and whenever such a misfortune befel him, which, for their own sakes, they were anxious to avoid, the intercourse between the lord and servant usually consisted in, “Where's Mr. Tracey? Why isn't Mr. Tracey here?” and when the reason for his absence was, as it always was, unavoidable, the peevish rejoinder was, “Where's Pat Mooney, then? Send Pat Mooney.” But however efficient the humble and devoted attachment of Tracey might render him as a substitute for all other society and attendants to the doting old man, and however much these and his other es-

timable qualities might be valued by his successors, their relative positions were materially changed ; and when Lord Lisbrian, calling his daughter aside, declared to her his intention of running any risk about the bank, by sending directly for his English servants, rather than endure the present annoyances one hour longer than necessary, she joyfully acquiesced, in preference to what she believed was risking their lives amongst a set of people, every one of whom she had ascertained to be papists, and, consequently, rebels.

A complete assortment of furniture, consistent at once with feudal grandeur and modern refinement, they both agreed was scarcely less necessary ; and before another day had passed, Lord Lisbrian had written for a complete country-house establishment of English servants, and given orders as vague and unlimited to the various artificers in London for what he denominated suitable furniture for the castle, as if the bank had been in the most prosperous state, or his new inheritance the most productive that his heart could wish ; indeed, on both points he was about equally sanguine and equally uninformed.

In vain did his son and son-in-law elect urge or hint to him the prudence of examining into the real value of a property which, to a casual observer, appeared, to say the least, in a doubtful state, from

the ruinous condition of the town and the villages of which it principally consisted. As long as he saw the broad acres, at once so new and delightful to his eye, and as Tracey was able to supply him with the comparatively trifling sums of money which he could find means of spending there, he could not be persuaded that further demonstration of his *wealth* was required ; and so long as the numerous workmen, summoned, without plan or consideration, to execute vast and expensive changes about the park, lodges, and gardens, took off their hats as he passed, and cried, “ God bless him ; ” what further testimony could be wanting of his *goodness* ? Lord Lisbrian was at this time, perhaps, as happy as it was possible for him to be ; and the election, with all its hopes and fears, exertions and annoyances, he now felt would be repletion. There was one, however, who could not suffer him to let it pass. Sir Charles Wilton did not return for more than a week after the time he promised ; and although his excuses for the delay were uttered with an apparent reserve and hesitation for the sake of the friend whom he had remained to serve, which satisfied every one else, his elder sister, nervously suspicious of every word and movement, could perceive, that whatever the cause had been, it had left an impression on his spirits the reverse of pleasurable. When she hinted at

this, however, the only answer she obtained was, "Frances, we are ruined, unless this election comes on immediately, and that I am returned. How is it possible they have not begun the canvassing yet?" And to Lord Lisbrian himself, although in more measured phrase, he was scarcely less peremptory.

And now it becomes necessary to say a few words respecting the neighbourhood into which Lord Lisbrian had so hastily transplanted himself and his family. It was situated in one of the most Irish parts of Ireland ; that is to say, the most remote, both by locality and circumstance, from more civilized countries. And as the chief proprietors of the soil, the Lords of Lisbrian, had been for many generations a thoughtless, spendthrift race, with just so much taste for civilization as to wish to spend their time and money amongst those who had more, and without enough of the principle of it to think of endeavouring to cultivate it at home, their deserted tenantry sunk by degrees lower and lower in the scale of moral existence. Those denominated the better classes, lending money to supply the landlord's exigencies, at interest so exorbitant that neither principal nor interest could be paid, were soon reduced to that most demoralizing of all states, where the consciousness of wealth causes industry to be considered a disgrace,

without the counterbalancing advantages which the actual possession seldom fails to bring; until, at last, deprived of all means of improvement or cultivation even by intercourse with others, and a sort of traditionary version of what they ought to be alone remaining, each family, if not each particular member, struck out a code of manners, and not unfrequently of morals, for itself, modified only by individual character or disposition, or by a ludicrous adoption of such stray reports of "gentility" as chance wafted their way; and the consequence was, that the separate members of what was there called society, while each would in any other part of the world have been denominated "a character," and gazed at as an "original," there only constituted essential parts of the whole.

Will it appear an anomaly that the evil consequences to the lower classes were by no means proportionate? They did not, indeed, keep pace in the moral scale with the rest of the world, and so far might be considered to have suffered; but it was rather a comparative than a positive evil; and as I believe no one will dispute that there is no position in human life so fully evidencing the law of nature "*reculer pour mieux sauter*," as the savage of whatever clime or colour taking his first step in civilization, so, if that first step still remained to be taken by the tenantry of Lisbrian, it

left them in their humble, reckless, credulous, warm-hearted, impressible ignorance and superstition, literally

“ The world forgetting, by the world forgot.”

And when the late Earl took some sudden whim to have them all registered as freeholders, without having lived to explain why, they went forward to the ordeal precisely as a flock of sheep goes forward to be branded with their owner's name. Had either the late landlord or his agent been of different characters from what they were, or had the former even continued a few years longer absent, doubtless matters would not have continued in this state—other influences would have been invited, or come uninvited in ; but as it was, locality and circumstance combined to form and keep them a sort of inverse oasis of the desert.

Such, with one or two accidental exceptions, were the people amongst whom the arrival of Lord Lisbrian and his party literally produced a moral convulsion of nature ; and who could, would, should, or might, or who could, would, should, or might not, visit and invite them to their houses occasioned more sleepless nights and more morning discussions than had been known in that neighbourhood for many a year. Many a wardrobe and chest was ransacked, and many a herd dismissed for sheep stolen by

ladies from their husbands' flocks, to supply the necessary articles of dress, according, as nearly as might be, to the reports of what Lady Rosa herself or the Miss Wiltons wore; but all had hitherto been without effect. For such was the state of the castle, furniture, and servants, that for the first week the order of the day was, "Not at home for ladies;" and the country squires, or squireens, did not run the risk of being excluded or—admitted.

And now it was that Tracey's capabilities came into requisition. While the situation which he held, whether by the caprice or judgment of the late Earl, and his intelligence, superior from very simplicity, made him indispensable to the present one as well as to Sir Charles; and his undeviating veracity and honesty of character, united to the most deprecating humility and consciousness of his own deficiencies in education and manners, which half redeemed, even when it seemed to increase, them, made him esteemed and valued by Hubert and his sister; the naïve and unconscious drollery, springing more from circumstance than talent, with which he gave out the information required of him respecting the neighbourhood into which the party found themselves so unexpectedly transplanted, and of which he knew every place, person, and event, past, present, and, we had nearly said, to come, rendered him inestimable to Miss Wilton, who at once adopted him as

a sort of domestic pet ; and, to his own very great amazement, the poor little man presently found himself not only existing in familiar intercourse with those whose sight had nearly deprived him of his reason, but enjoying it with a sort of eager, humble intensity, such as a mortal might be supposed to feel in another and a brighter sphere, and which, perhaps, went as far as anything else in proving that, however low his standard in other points might be, the debasement had not reached his mind.

Indeed, Miss Wilton it was who undertook to “manage” him for her brother, and to extract from him such sketches of the different families around as might enable him and herself to canvass them with effect; for although Lord Lisbrian could not, and did not, draw back from his promise to Sir Charles, it was perfectly evident that, even had his talents been more calculated for canvassing than they were, his mind, with all his good-will, was at this time much too full of other matter to suffer him to exert them effectually; while Lady Rosa, all stoutly as she had expressed her principles, or prejudices, when first the subject was presented to her in London, found it a matter so very different to solicit strangers in support of the person who was shortly to be her husband, however ignorant the strangers might be of the fact, that her delicacy and gentleness alike shrank from

the task ; and though she also considered herself bound to assist, her friends did not calculate much upon her success. There were cases, however, in which both father and daughter were able to give assistance without much annoyance to their individual feelings,—the one, by inviting to dinner such of the neighbouring gentlemen as he should meet at fairs, markets, or other places of public resort, all which he declared his intention of attending, with somewhat of the glee of a school-boy in possession of a new toy; the other, by making visits round the neighbourhood, to those who might, or might not, feel themselves entitled to wait on her. To this much exertion they both cheerfully consented. And it was in fulfilment of Lady Rosa's part of the treaty, that, the day after Sir Charles's arrival, the carriage was ordered to be ready immediately after luncheon ; and as the ladies were still as complete strangers to their neighbours as when they first arrived, Miss Wilton called on Tracey to furnish them with a *carte du pays*, as well moral as geographical, to guide them in their progress, and their project.

Tracey considered gravely for some minutes ; and then abruptly said, “ Whethen, it's a quare thing ; but as much as ever I have thought about it, and whether it's lady or gentleman, poor or rich, married or single, the way to all their hearts, as far as I

can see, is still the same, and that is, through pride of one kind or another. There's Misther O'Shaughnessy, and his pride is all in his name; there's the Careys, and theirs is in a foreign kind of chapel he built, joining his house; there's Miss Burn, and hers is in her one tenant; and Miss Dowling's in outshinin' Miss Burn, and they both old-maids, well on to seventy, hardly able to live between pride and poverty; and there's Captain Lopdell, and his is in his military stock! But, considerin' that O'Shaughnessy's eldest daughter is to be married to my Lord's head clerk, Steen, which they call a connexion between the families, I b'lieve you're best go to them first,—any one will shew you the way along the road."

"What is the name of their residence, in order that we may make ourselves intelligible in inquiring for it?" asked Miss Wilton.

"Oh, then, there's a little story about that. You see, when Misther O'Shaughnessy first came from his travels, with his English wife, that they say was an apothecary's daughter,—and, indeed, something must have been amiss with a pretty girl, as she certainly was then, to give three thousand pounds to an old man like him. It's long before he'd have got it in Ireland!"

"Oh, you never give pretty girls fortune here, we know. You consider a promise of it quite enough."

“ Well, Ma’am, and what’s the man worth that id ask more than a pretty girl’s hand, and a gentleman’s promise?” And not even Miss Wilton’s keenness could discover whether there was a tinge of gallantry mingled with the simplicity with which Tracey asked the question. It was but momentary, however, if there was ; and probably unsuspected by himself, for he immediately went on, “ But to answer you about the name, Ma’am. Well ; when this Giles O’Shaughnessy came home, nothing would do him but to call his place ‘ Milan Hall,’ after a place abroad, he said, where he lived with dukes and princes ; but Mrs. O’Shaughnessy, bein’ English, could’nt get her tongue about the ‘ h,’ and pronounced it ‘ Milan’all ;’ and what with the pronounciation of one, and the pronounciation of another, it fairly turned into ‘ my land all.’ And then he got so ashamed of seeming evermore to be boastin’ of his dudeen* of an estate—for it’s no more—that he dhropped the whim altogether, and now not a name it ever gets but ‘ The O’Shaughnessy’s Place,’ so that’s what you’ll ask for.”

“ Grasp all, lose all, you see, Mr. Tracey. But though you mention their property with something that sounds like disparagement, Mr. O’Shockinisey has some votes, has he not ?”

* Literally, a short, mutilated tobacco-pipe.

“ Oh, I’ll engage he has, Ma’am—plenty ! There’s not a ridge of potatoes but he turned into a vote, when he came over to make himself a great man ; but not one of them Sir Charles ’ill ever be the better of, beggin’ your pardon, if you pronounce his name in that manner !”

“ How do you mean, Mr. Tracey ?”

“ Oh, Ma’am, I declare I’d hardly blame him myself, for I know well they’d all think you were crying out, ‘ Oh shocking I see,’ in their faces, for they’re not handsome,—that’s he’s not !”

“ Well, pray, dear Mr. Tracey, teach me how to pronounce it !” Miss Wilton exclaimed, in great delight. “ You’ll find me not a stupid pupil, for I have a very good ear for music !”

“ Oh, well, if you have, you’ll do, Ma’am ; for it’s a very soft, flowin’ kind of name when humoured rightly. See, O’Shaugh-nessy, with a good *augh* in your throat. Ay ! That was better. Oh, my word, I wouldn’t say but you’d coax him yet, but it will take some practice, for Sir Charles wouldn’t be the first gentleman that lost the borough by their pride.”

“ Really ! Seriously do you mean ? How was that ?” Miss Wilton more anxiously inquired.

“ Why, a very nice and good, but plain-mannered Englishman came here to canvass once, on Lord Still-Organ’s interest, soon after this man was

married, and before my late Lord came over or cared about them things; and, it seems, in bad hour for himself, he knew some of her people in England; and some one telling him the O'Shaughnessy's liked to be made much of, he asks her husband, at a great election ball to introduce him to his lady. And when O'Shaughnessy, swellin' with pride, puffs up the len'th of the room, dhrawin' every one he could along with him, to see the honour, Mr. Palmer—that was his name—holds out his hand to her, and tells her he was very happy to see her well, or somethin' that way, for that her uncle was one of the most civil, industrious, honest workmen he ever knew! O'Shaughnessy had to be carried out in a fit; and Mither Palmer lost his election, for it was a close run, one field of potatoes would have turned it; but there's no denyin' *some* of the English have quare notions of praise!"

"Or else the Irish. However, we'll not dispute about that now, but endeavour to humour Mr. Giles Oshauginsy as well as we can."

Tracey shook his head despairingly. "Watch yourself,—watch yourself, Miss Wilton," he said; "that wasn't so well said, and take care above all things, would you slip out the Christian name to any of them."

"Why, there surely is no difficulty in pronouncing that?"

"So much the worse, if that id lade you to say

it! at laste with Mither before it, as if he wasn't the head and root of the whole world of O'Shaughnessys! and in that, indeed, he's only his father's son, for *he* quarrelled for ever with his own uncle, that it was thought would have left him a mint o' money he made abroad, because when he came home and knocked at his nephew's door, he sent in his name as *Mr.* O'Shaughnessy, as if he was the head of the family, and he of the younger branch. The nephew was in his parlour at the time with his son, this present Giles, and a son of his again, an infant in the nurse's arms, that's since dead; and when the servant brought in the message, he reddened up like a turkey-cock, and says, 'Go out again, Pat, or John, or Tom,' or whatever he called him,—'go out again and ask this person his name,' and when the same answer came back, 'Shew him in,' he says; and when the poor, innocent uncle was hurryin' up to him, 'Stand back, Sir!' he says, swellin' himself up twice his ushal size, and he was a mighty big man at all times, with the biggest face and features you ever seen, and his son's for all the world the very same. 'Stand back! and let me hear you repate that message you sent me in.' 'Message, Sir? I sent you no message,' says the poor man, in a great surprise, 'but my name.' 'Sir, it's false!' shouted the other, 'it's *not* your name, and if you persist in saying it is, *I* shall send *you* a message!' Sir, I beg to in-

form you that *I* am Mr. O'Shaughnessy,' wavin' his broad hand towards his own breast; 'and when I am gone, there'—wavin' it towards this Giles—'is Mr. O'Shaughnessy; and when *he's* gone, there'—to the poor whingin' infant—'is Mr. O'Shaughnessy!' What do you say but the uncle flew out o' the house, and went straight back abroad, and left all his wealth to charities, lamentin' in his will that his natural heir was out of his mind. So you see, Miss Wilton, it's no blame to this man to be proud; and he must be managed a little carefully."

Miss Wilton was about to reply, when a knocking at the hall door announcing visitors, the ladies started up to escape for their bonnets; but while Lady Rosa delayed a moment to request of Mr. Tracey to have them denied, she heard her name called from the opposite door of the dining-room, and, on turning round, perceived her brother Hubert entering, followed by a stranger, the grace and elegance of whose tall, but slightly formed person, and the beautiful harmony of whose chiselled features, with a perfectly colourless, though not pallid complexion, and a head whose classic mould was rather enhanced than concealed by the dark curls thickly clustering round a high and noble forehead, made her decide him, at a glance, by far the most perfect specimen of manly beauty she had ever seen; while the undefinably expressive bow

with which he acknowledged her presence the moment she looked round,—his magnificent black eyes at the same time veiling themselves as if through respect behind their own dark curtains, made her feel, almost to painful consciousness, that she never had, till that moment, known, scarcely in her secret soul imagined, what real, mind-born, high-bred polish and refinement meant. The stranger was the Honourable Gerald Rochford, the young pastor of the parish.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ I HAVE the pleasure to say, Rosa,” said her brother, as she returned with him and Mr. Rochford to the luncheon table, “ that I have prevailed on Rochford to take up his abode with us here, instead of in miserable lodgings, which is all that Lisbrian affords, while the Glebe is undergoing some repairs. Nor will it be a sinecure to you, either,” he added, addressing Rochford, as he went himself towards the side-table, to attack some cold beef which attracted his attention ; “ for you must not only give us your own interest, but help us to canvass every one else, in favour of Sir Charles Wilton, who, it seems, my father is determined shall be one of our members.”

“ *Sir Charles Wilton !*” repeated Mr. Rochford, in a tone more expressive of the extremity of

amazement than Lady Rosa could have supposed, the moment before, he was capable of feeling, much less of exhibiting ; and he turned hastily, to see whether Hubert could be serious.

Hubert, however, having his back towards him, was too well occupied to observe more than his words and tone, to which he replied, “ Yes ; don’t you remember a fifth-form man of that name, at Eton, when I first went there, and afterwards at Oxford ? He is here just now, with his two sisters, who turn out to be Rosa’s dearest friends.”

Had any one beheld Rochford at that moment for the first time, it would have been difficult to persuade that person that his complexion could ever have been colourless. The deepest, most vivid crimson, rushed violently over his whole face ; and, while Lady Rosa gazed in irrepressible astonishment upon him, she saw that he had some difficulty in suppressing any yet more evident manifestation of agitation. She found it impossible to resist inquiring if he were acquainted with the Miss Wiltons ; or rather, she asked it on the impulse of the moment, without taking time to consider that the question might be embarrassing. It evidently was so. He stammered, and hesitated, and finally, it was more by his manner than his words that she gathered that he was.

Hubert’s hunger being appeased, he presently

returned to the table ; and, unconscious of what had been passing, proposed that they should adjourn to the drawing-room. Lady Rosa rose to lead the way ; but, as she did so, she heard Mr. Rochford excuse himself, on the plea, of being obliged to return immediately to his father.

“ We shall see you at dinner ? ” she said, as she received his adieu.

“ I fear not, to-day ; it will not be in my power to return to-day,” he answered, gently, but decidedly ; and, as if painfully conscious that his were eyes to betray, in their flashes of “ dark light,” more than he might choose, he again suffered their peculiarly long dark fringe to fall over them.

Hubert, catching the words, laid his hand on his shoulder, and exclaimed, “ What ? Why, you said, not half-an-hour since, that your father was better, and that you would dine and sleep here to-day.” Rochford’s embarrassment returned in double force ; and after a very fruitless attempt at a coherent reply, he laughed and said, “ I beg your pardon, Lady Rosa, for obliging you to lose so much time upon a subject so unworthy ; but—that is—if—in short,” he said, with a sort of desperate determination, and again colouring, though less violently than before, “ If I shall not lose my character for ever for consistency, I shall return to din-

ner," and with a hasty bow he left the room. Lady Rosa hastened to the drawing-room, all impatience to have the mystery of Mr. Rochford's embarrassment solved by her friend; but, on opening the door, she was startled to find her there equipped for the drive indeed, but alone, and pale, trembling, agitated, and clinging to the frame-work of one of the windows for support! Hastening towards her, she threw her arms round her, exclaiming, "Good heavens! what is the matter, my dearest Frances? You are ill—very ill! What can have happened? so unusual as it is with you!" And she would have led her to a chair, but Miss Wilton feebly resisted, keeping her eyes fixed upon the window. Lady Rosa looked out, but could see nothing, and only heard the sounds of horses retreating at a rapid pace, to which Miss Wilton now also turned an eager ear. When they had quite ceased, she sat, or rather sank down, upon the broad window-seat, and in a low, hoarse tone asked, "Who was that, Rosa, that just rode from the door?"

"Hubert, I dare say; and—and—" but Lady Rosa had already become fearful of adding, "and Mr. Rochford." Miss Wilton started up with sudden and startling energy, as if restored by an electric shock, and seizing Lady Rosa's arm, and glaring wildly in her face, she exclaimed, "Speak! speak!—say on!—why do you hesitate? Tell me

for Heaven's sake ! Sure, it is not possible that he has already—that you have learned —— Rosa,” she said, as suddenly releasing her hold, subduing her manner, and again speaking in a peculiarly low, expressive tone. “Rosa ! was that—*Mr. Rochford* ?”

Lady Rosa said it was. Miss Wilton leaned back against the window, and covered her face with her hand.

“What is the matter, dear Frances ?” Lady Rosa gently asked, after a short pause, and endeavouring to draw down her hand ; she suffered her to do so, and then asked in the same tone,

“Where did he come from, Rosa ? or where is he gone to ?”

“He is the clergyman of this parish ; eldest son of Lord Still-Organ ; and he returns to——”

But she was interrupted by a wild shriek, “Hah ! what ! the clergyman of this parish ? It is impossible !—it is quite impossible, quite impossible,—I assure you !” and Miss Wilton laughed, and looked, and spoke so wildly that Lady Rosa rose in great alarm to call her sister. Once more, however, she seized her arm, and pulled her down again beside her ; but as suddenly starting up, “Come into some other room with me,” she said, “where we shall be free from interruption. Not yours, or mine, but any other, and I will tell you all !” and she almost drew Lady Rosa along ; and, turning

into the first room they found open, she locked the door, and throwing herself on her knees before Lady Rosa, and burying her head in her lap, she remained perfectly silent for some moments.

“ Really, my dear Frances,” Lady Rosa almost sobbed out at last, “ I wish very much you would compose yourself, and tell me what is the meaning of all this. I am really excessively frightened.”

Miss Wilton instantly, without rising, sat down on the ground at her feet, and said, with apparent calmness, “ I will, Rosa. I will tell you all, or nearly all. That Rochford that you saw, or that I, at least, saw riding from the door this day, is my destiny ! I love him, Rosa—and have loved him for years as, I am very sure, no woman ever loved man before ! I know others have said this of their own feelings, because they have wept and sighed through years of absence. I have done neither. Have you ever seen me do so ? or even suspected my secret ? No, I have lived—I have, comparatively, enjoyed life—because I had the one conviction ever to support me, that my death must follow any insuperable barrier placed between us. And for the little accidents of time and space !—” and again she laughed wildly—“ let them be recognised by those whose puny souls can put limits to the idle fancy which they call love ! No, Rosa, I know I am breaking on you in a new light,

but do not be startled, dearest. Why, you little goose, you are absolutely trembling! What is this for? have I been speaking violently? Well, I shall make haste and finish. Rochford, on leaving Oxford, previous to taking holy orders, made the tour of the Continent; he came to Florence just as we arrived there from England, the most perfect being, mind and person, that the fancy of woman ever revelled in. He is two or three years, I believe, younger than I am, and yet so superior was his mind—his soul—his intellect—his whole character—in which the highest feelings and aspirations of our nature were in all the freshness and enthusiasm of boyhood, that my soul absolutely worshipped him; nay, the expression may be strong, or even sinful; but you know," she said, smiling, "we Catholics, I mean—really my head is, I believe, wandering!" and she pressed her hand to it to conceal the tell-tale colour that rushed to her cheek—"I mean the Catholics with whom we then associated—and how curious are the links of association in the brain! Well, you know, *they* say that if the sin be committed, confession is the only remedy; so again I tell you I worshipped Rochford. *Did?* Great God! However, what is infinitely more extraordinary, he fell in love with me! It may have been, indeed, and I sometimes have feared it was"—and her voice sunk into a low

and melancholy cadence, while her countenance assumed the calm of painful meditation. "I have sometimes feared it was but the faint reflection of *my* passion ; and, alas ! I *know* that, at best, it was but the idol of his own glorious imagination ! But then they tell us all love is that, and I was willing to persuade myself of it, even while I held the refutation within my own bosom. But, however, let it have been what it might, his love took the place of God's vital spark within *me* ; and I live while it lives, and die if it dies ! It may be dead already, it may be,—for I have neither seen nor heard of him for two years—but if it is, Rosa, if it is, my sweet friend, and that I cannot revive it, the vault of the Lisbrians will, for the first time, open to admit a Wilton !"

Lady Rosa shuddered, and hid her eyes, as if she would shut out a picture of human passion—and that in her own familiar friend—such as she had not only never witnessed, but never read, heard of, or imagined, till that moment. She felt as if she was in some hideous dream, or as if some fearful phenomenon of nature was developing itself before her.

Miss Wilton was too deeply absorbed in her own feelings immediately to observe her ; but presently she exclaimed, "Rosa, is it not a fearful tale ? and have you not a word to comfort me with ?"

“ My dearest Frances, what *can* I say ?” she replied. “ I am really bewildered ; but I do not understand—you have not told me why you ever were separated, with such attachment on both sides.”

“ Attachment ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! Poor, simple child ! And on both sides ? Have I not told you—have I not honestly told you—that heaven and earth are scarcely more opposite than our feelings for each other ; and yet—that is false ! I wrong myself there ! There is, there never was, more guilt in mine than what may attach to adoration of an earthly being, if indeed such he is ! And his for me ! Oh, it was as if an angel, wandering upon earth, were dazzled by the rays of his own glory into believing some mortal, on whom they shone, divine, and bowed to her as such ! But such rays converge the nearer they approach to such an object ! Ha, ha ! ha ! Rosa,” she exclaimed, once again altering her manner, “ I have a mind—I really have a mind—to tell you all !—it would be so very odd to have you for a real confidante, or, indeed, for *me* to have a confidante at all ! I should lose my own identity ! But what then ? I might become a wiser and a better being. But it is too late for that ; and I forget that others would be involved in my confession. I really believe that I am raving ! But you may imagine, Rosa, piece of pure, heaven-fallen snow though you are,—you may imagine how I must feel,

when, after two years of feverish existence, during which I dared not make any direct, and had no opportunities for making indirect, inquiries respecting him, further than what procured me the information that he had become rector of a parish in L'Ultima Thule; to find myself suddenly on the very spot with him, I may say, and to know that a few short weeks, perhaps days, must seal my fate for ever. I give myself that much time, because, even in the midst of our fracas—for we quarrelled, I forgot to tell you,—which was the cause of our parting—but even then I could see that, however enthusiastic and vehemently ardent in his feelings, he can command, or at least conquer, them; so that I do not intend attempting to take him by storm! No, scarcely, ha! ha!—and lookers-on will see two beings meeting and parting, day by day, perhaps sitting side by side, and talking as if they had never met or parted before, or never cared to meet or part again! and even you, Rosa, will see nothing more, notwithstanding the key I have given you—and yet the work will be going on! It will be progressing quietly, sweetly, delightfully! No one must meddle with it, Rosa. I must grow upon him, steal upon him, as an altered character! But I really do believe I was raving!” she said, rousing herself from the sort of dreamy, rapt tone and manner in which she had expressed her inten-

tions and her hopes. "But you were going, I think, to tell me he was returning to some place?"

"I was going to tell you he was to return to dinner here to-day."

"To dinner here to-day!" she repeated, gaspingly. "How do you know?"

"He told me so," Lady Rosa answered, smiling.

"Told you so? Told you so?" Miss Wilton asked in a low, doubting sort of tone. "Rosa, my sweet child, have I infected you with my delirium? When did you ever see Gerald Rochford?"

"Just before I came up to you. He came in with Hubert to the dining-room just as you and Susan left it."

"And why did you not send for me?" she asked, in a voice of strange, calm restraint, while her eyes were seeking, as it were, to pierce into Lady Rosa's very soul.

"You forget, dear Frances, I was not aware that you were acquainted with him."

"I *did* forget it," with a slight formal bow. "But did he not inquire for me? First, did he know we were here?"

"Not when he came in."

"And when he heard it?"

"He seemed very much surprised, and certainly a good deal agitated."

"But still he agreed to come?"

“He did;” and Lady Rosa was again literally afraid to tell her that he had hesitated.

“And why did you not tell me all this before, Rosa?”

“Why really you have not given me time; I came up quite anxious to tell you.”

Miss Wilton was silent for a moment, and then without the slightest alteration of tone, countenance, or manner, except that she removed her eyes from Lady Rosa’s face, and cast them on the ground, she asked, “And what do you think of him?”

“I agree with you that he is extraordinarily handsome.”

“You do? And his manners?”

“Seem to me equally perfect.”

“*Equally perfect!* you forget you had not spoken of *perfection* before!”

Lady Rosa coloured slightly; but more from the inquisitorial tone of the examination to which she was so abruptly subjected than for having frankly expressed her opinion. Miss Wilton finding she remained silent, slowly raised her eyes, which she had hitherto kept as if forcibly fixed upon the ground, and scrutinizing Lady Rosa’s countenance with the same deeply searching glance, she took her hand and said, impressively, “Rosa, I believe you have a certain degree of

friendship for me; nay, you need not speak, except to give me the one proof of it which my heart, be it from weakness or from wickedness, can henceforth no longer live without. Swear to me, swear it solemnly, that I shall never find a rival in my only friend?"

Lady Rosa absolutely started at this unexpected appeal. "Frances, I am really afraid you are seriously unwell!" she cried. "I wish you would endeavour to compose yourself, and put an end to this agitating conference."

"You refuse me then? But, at least, be an open enemy, Rosa! Do not seek to deceive while you betray." And, though her voice was calm, her countenance was gradually resuming a certain wildness, which terrified her companion more than anything else.

"I shall neither deceive nor betray you, Frances," she said, gently. "But, indeed, I must insist on leaving you now, for I am unable to endure this any longer. Let me have the key of the door."

"And what then do you suppose are my capabilities of endurance? Oh, Rosa! Rosa! However, you have promised, you have said, at least, enough to shew me that your present intentions are in my favour; now, then, nothing but girlish prejudices can prevent your complying with a re-

quest on which my peace of mind, if not my reason itself, depends. Rosa, will you *swear* to me that nothing, no change of circumstances, or any accident whatever, will ever induce you to accept the vows of Gerald Rochford? For a horrid, a fearful phantom—it may be a presentiment—has come over me, that you are suited, destined for each other!” And she bowed her head into her hands; and, as if humbled into feminine feeling by the admission, she burst, for the first time, into tears.

No threats, no rantings, no terror excited in herself could have produced such an effect upon the feeling heart of Lady Rosa as these tears in a friend whom she had ever looked upon as a very rock of sense and firmness. Of both, indeed, her opinion was already shaken by this interview. But as she thought of the efforts it must have required to keep up the appearances so long, she pitied her but the more for what she knew would, hereafter, be a cause of the deepest mortification; and, without waiting for her to repeat her request, she threw her arms round her, and said, “Dear Frances, however unnecessary I feel it to be, I do solemnly promise never, knowingly, to interfere with the slightest of your feelings on the subject you allude to!”

“It is enough!” exclaimed Miss Wilton, suddenly stifling her sobs. “It is enough; for I know

the worth of your promises, Rosa. And now let us separate. I could not, and I am sure you could not, attempt to canvass the good people to-day, so I will e'en to my room, and lie down for an hour, and I recommend you to do the same."

On going to her room, Miss Wilton passed through that of her sister, where finding her seated opposite the mirror, still putting the last finishing touch to the position of a ringlet under her bonnet, an operation which, never ceasing, was always renewed, until she should be summoned to set out, she informed her in as steady a voice as she could command that the expedition was given up for that day. Susan, who had just, at last, placed the curl inimitably, turned round with an impatient, angry inquiry whether it was "possible?" and on the information being confirmed, she flung her shawl and bonnet violently on the bed, declaring that "the trials of this life were past endurance;" and her sister for once agreed with her.

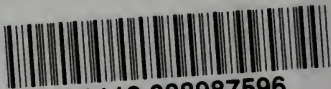
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